

THE HOUSE IN HAARLEM

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Arthur van Schendel

THE HOUSE IN HAARLEM

Translated from the Dutch by

M. S. STEPHENS

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CHAPTER ONE

A MAN SAT IN THE DIM PARLOUR ADDING UP FIGURES by the light of an oil lamp, but the wick began to burn low, and his eyes were weak. He noticed that it had grown cold, and through the chink of the blind he could see light snow-flakes on the window-pane. He stood up to look for a candle. When he opened the cupboard ~~and~~ was feeling on the top shelf, a small book fell from it. He placed the candle close beside his accounts. It was a little old book. When he was a boy he had seen his father using just such a one, writing down every evening with his quill-pen what he had received and spent, just as he himself now did every evening. He opened it and read what was written on the inside of the cover : " 19 January 1835." That was the year of his birth. And beneath that, in faded ink, but still legible, the words : " A child when it is born is as white as snow, but he who looks carefully will see on the snow a red stain ; that is sin."

He seemed to hear his father saying it. From his earliest years he had heard him speak of snow and blood ; it used to keep him awake at night,

and he would hide his head under the blankets so that he shouldn't see the dreadful faces. Once, when he was ten years old, he had committed the sin of theft—it was only an apple that hung over the fence ; he came home with the feeling that there was blood clinging to him, and his father looked at him as though he could see it, and in the days that followed he had to hear such terrible things that he would have liked to cry. But he had never been able to cry. ' That boy doesn't know what tears are,' his father would say sometimes ; ' that will be his downfall, a hard heart that cannot weep over sin.' But even then he had thought to himself : God knows better how much it hurts. Throughout their youth they had all had sin and retribution drummed into them ; the others did not take so much notice as he did ; he, too, was certainly the only one who had realised that their father himself was terribly tortured. Why ? That was a riddle whose answer he would never know. The waters of the Spaarne even would not be able to say whether he had jumped or fallen in. Ever since he had begun to think he had always believed that an upright man should bear his heritage with patience, take care not to fall into sin knowingly and wilfully, and pray for forgiveness for those misdeeds he nonetheless committed. He thought that his father had believed this too, but he couldn't understand why it was then that he was so persecuted by fear. And

what did it signify that he should have written this in an account-book on the day that his child was born? He must have sat at this same table, in the evening after the shop was shut. He had sat there thinking about the fate of the new-born child, and the first thing he saw was sin, red as blood. But why write it down?

And why should the book with those words in it, after all these years, fall at the feet of him, his son? There is a purpose in everything, he thought, even in the fact that his father's voice still admonished him long after it had been silenced for ever. He knew his duty and carried it out conscientiously, but his thoughts were full of sin, and when he pondered over this he could not understand it. What mind was capable of fathoming the hidden depths of man? We long for good and yet we are full of wickedness.

Here was a case in point. Why must his first thought always be of harm? His brothers were long since grown-up men who could look after themselves and no longer needed their elder brother's care. He looked at the clock, which was slowly striking eleven. Diderik was not usually so late coming home, but he was a boy who kept to the right path. As for the other, he had reason to fear he might get into bad company; not that there was much harm in him, but he didn't think he had much sense. To his mind the boy was too fond of

sitting in coffee-houses and going for walks with queer fellows of no particular calling ; he looked as heedless as a child, as though he never thought of anything serious. And though there was no need to think he would get into trouble, he realised that he would have to keep a watchful eye on him for the time being. He himself was the eldest and the strongest, he must be the guardian of the family.

Then he lifted his head and listened. The bell kept tinkling at Thijs's, his next-door neighbour ; Thijs served his customers till past eleven o'clock. But he heard another sound too. It seemed quite near, as though two voices were whispering loudly. He looked through the glass of the door ; it was dark in the shop, the flame of the candle was reflected in the pane. Then he heard smothered laughter. He stood up, he pulled the blind on one side, but the snowflakes prevented him from seeing anything through the window. Now he could hear it more distinctly, the voice of a woman, with a note of mockery in it. It was in the yard. He opened the door leading to the passage, took the candle and went into the kitchen. The whispering and giggling sounded more distinct. He unbolted the door and stepped outside ; in the light of the candle he could see two wet branches of the apple-tree, and when he held the light farther forward he could see the trunk too, but nothing else. Now the voices seemed to be receding. ' Is anyone there ? ' he

called out. There was silence ; the flame of the candle was burning low, damped by the flakes that fell on it. He knew he was nervous and apt to imagine things, but at this moment he had a feeling that there was someone in the yard, or behind the shed. ' Who's there ? ' he called again. Then he decided it must have been a cat.

He bolted the door again, returned to the parlour and went on with his accounts.

Every evening he sat like this, alone, after he had shut the shop. His brother, Diderik, went out then. Frans would have gone out earlier ; as long as he could remember, Frans had never waited until they had shut, and invariably, when he was asked why he was so impatient, he would be embarrassed and answer, with his eyes turned away, that he felt he must get out into the air ; even as a little boy he had been the same. In the past both Gerbrand and Diderik, when they saw him in the street, had often followed him to spy out what he did, but all they had ever seen was that he walked alone, quietly, without turning his head, and before the clock in the Tower struck nine, winter and summer, he was always to be found somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Market Square. There he would walk up and down, usually behind the Church, sometimes standing still as though he was gazing at something in the distance. Then, after an hour or so, he would come home. He had always done

this, and he still did it, and all the neighbours, without exception, thought he was a little simple. But in the shop he did his work as well as anyone, and Gerbrand never had to find fault with him either for his weighing or his calculating. Whereas Diderik, whom everyone considered to be much quicker-witted, often made mistakes and was not so conscientious about his work. Gerbrand believed that their mother had been right when she said that he and Frans were the most scrupulous about their duties ; Diderik was rather indifferent, and the black sheep was Kasper, who had left home years ago now. The heedlessness couldn't come from her, for only the three youngest were her children. The tendency to wander might well derive from the Werendonks. There were still old people in the street who shook their heads and said : ' That fellow Werendonk ! ' More than that Gerbrand had never heard, but he had understood well enough that this was a reference to the thoughtlessness which he and the other children had never known about.

Frequently, while he was at his figures, he laid his pen down, looked at the clock and thought of the old days. How many times had it happened that he had heard them talking in the room overhead, his father and his stepmother ; all at once her voice would be raised so that he could hear what she was saying : ' Oh, don't do it ! ' And then he

would hear her crying. She had always been easily upset, she frequently had red eyes and her handkerchief in her hand, and doubtless the good creature had a weight on her mind, for she often sighed, and her voice was plaintive as though she were always unhappy. Now that she was no more, he thought of her most often as she used to be sitting when he came home from school, on the other side of the table, with her needlework on her lap ; her head was dark against the window with the fuchsia growing round it, she held her handkerchief to her eyes. The children took no notice of her tears, but, at a later period, when the others were out and he was at home alone with his elder sister, he in the shop and she at the back, he often felt the oppression of her melancholy in the house. Then it seemed to him that the shop and the back-parlour were dark ; he had the feeling that something was weighing down the roof, a burden from years that were past.

No doubt his father had felt this, and felt it even more acutely than he did. He had often said : ‘ Life is full of anxieties, our forefathers have laid a heavy burden upon us.’ And you could see that he had something worse in his mind. He spoke little, his voice had a discontented sound, he was perpetually admonishing and finding fault ; at other times he was silent and looked straight in front of him, at the floor or at the ceiling. He ate

slowly as though his thoughts were elsewhere, but sometimes he heard what one of the children was saying, and he was ready at once with a rebuke or a slap. Particularly himself, Gerbrand, he picked out for his homilies on sin ; on the slightest provocation he would say : ‘ Look out, mind what you’re doing ; sin is at the door, you’ll come to a bad end.’ During the last two years of his life, after their mother’s death, everyone could see that he had something on his mind. In the evening, when the lamp was lighted, he would sit for hours, after he had laid aside the newspaper, gazing in front of him, until suddenly he would stroke his head impatiently, stand up and shift something on the side table, or on the mantelpiece. Then he would drive the younger ones up to bed, and would follow them himself. Later he developed the habit of going out as soon as the shop was shut, without his supper, without even checking the money in the till. No one had ever seen him go in anywhere or walking with anyone, and there was no doubt that the neighbours were right about that. He just wandered about the town. Then he would have to sit up late to do his accounts. One evening, when he had not returned by twelve o’clock, the boys knocked up Thijs, and some of their friends went to look for him in the town ; the coffee-houses were shut. Gerbrand went and walked along by the Spaarne, because he had at once thought of an

accident. It was a fruitless task, for the Spaarne was broad, and by the faint light of the street lamps it was hardly possible to distinguish the outlines of the barges. But it turned out he was right ; two days later they pulled him out and brought him home ; he had an expression on his face that he had never had during his life, as though at last he had found deliverance. Everyone thought it was an accident, but Gerbrand could not help thinking of something else. Their faithful Jansje, too, had nodded her head and said : ‘ Yes, it must have been an accident,’ as though she didn’t believe it. But of the children none of the others had ever had a doubt ; indeed, the three youngest had no conception of such disasters. Why it should have been anything else than an accident caused by the darkness it was impossible to say, for, as far as was known, his father had had no reason for making away with himself. He owned three houses besides the shop ; moreover, he had a trifle invested, and his business was in a satisfactory state. When he had succeeded to the shop the receipts had not been a sixth of what they were when he passed it on. He never had to worry about money. And yet Gerbrand was convinced that there had been something that consumed him, but that had remained a secret, and no one save God alone knew anything about it. O Lord, he prayed in his heart, have mercy on him.

He heard the key in the door ; that was Diderik coming in, and it was gone half-past eleven. The accounts were not finished. The lamp was out, but the candle was burning with a long flame. Diderik came in with heavy footsteps. 'You ought to have a fire,' he said, 'there's a sharp frost.'

'Peat costs money,' answered the elder brother, without looking up. 'It's late and Frans isn't home yet.'

'Good-night,' said the one. 'Good-night,' replied the other.

Gerbrand turned his attention to one of his books, but he grew restless. It annoyed him that Diderik should be so indifferent as to what his youngest brother did. He was a good lad, and could be relied on, but it seemed as though he remained unmoved by the fate of his nearest blood relations ; as upright as a tree, but unfeeling in other people's troubles, as though in no way concerned about their mistakes and errors. He remained calm in all circumstances. He was the one who most resembled their father in appearance, sturdy and broad-shouldered, with the same hard lines round his tight lips. Like his father, too, he was taciturn. But in temperament he was very different ; he was uniformly good-tempered, and always ready to do as he was asked. And, apart from that indifference of his, he was undoubtedly the best of them all. Why hadn't he said a word now as to why he had been so late.

The Toekens went to bed early, so there must have been some special reason for his staying so long at his sweetheart's.

The clock in the Tower began to strike, slowly and with a muffled sound, not so loudly as usual, probably because the wind had veered to the east. Cold weather was to be expected so near December. The last strokes were barely audible. Then Frans's voice could be heard outside, he was no doubt standing at the foot of the steps talking to the night-watchman. His eyes rested on the words in the book that had fallen out of the cupboard ; he closed it. There was a faint tinkle of the bell ; he went and opened the door.

Frans stood there, snow-flakes glistening on his cap and on his shoulders, and behind him beneath the lamp the night-watchman, his hat quite white. ' Congratulations on the birth of your nephew, Werendonk,' said the latter in a low tone, so as not to disturb the neighbours. And Frans said softly, but delightedly : ' The baby's born, a boy, and he's to be called Floris.'

After Gerbrand had thanked the watchman and wished him good-night, he closed the door. In the middle of the room he turned round and asked : ' Is that why you're so late ? '

' Yes, brother. It was just half-past nine when I got there, and I had to go off immediately to fetch the doctor, and when I got back I felt I must stay

until the baby was born. I'm glad it's over ; I was nervous, I don't know why. Yes, brother, everything's all right, I assure you, and tomorrow we'll have hundreds and thousands on our bread and butter. I must go round early to see the baby.'

'This is a blessing sent by the Lord,' said Gerbrand, 'not only for Agnete and her husband, but for all of us. We must remember that. But go to bed now, it's much too late for you.'

Frans looked at the table. 'Did you find that little book?' he asked. 'It was up in the attic, and I brought it down and put it on the shelf there. The date of your birth is written in it, just as it is in the Bible, but without your name.'

His elder brother pointed to the stairs, so he went up. Gerbrand kept his eye on the door, listening for the creak of the stairs. The boy was turned four and twenty, but he was still submissive and obedient, and that was only as it should be, for he was still very childish. He was only given two quarters a week for pocket-money, although he was entitled to his full share, and when Gerbrand gave him the money on Saturdays, he first emptied his purse of all he had over and put that in his money-box. For a year past he had always had something over ; before that he used sometimes to spend something on sweets for his sister, but now she was married there was no one to buy anything for, except Stien and the daily woman. But latterly,

Gerbrand had noticed that he sometimes had nothing left by the middle of the week, and when he was asked about this, it would turn out that he had been to a café with some lads from the cotton-mill. That must be watched, for today it might be milk, but tomorrow it would be brandy. But still, he couldn't be going about much with these lads, for whenever anyone met him in the street he was always alone, and in the evening after half-past eight it was well known that he never went anywhere except to the Market Square or somewhere in its vicinity. What the boy went there for nobody could ever make out. He chatted with the verger, and also with the town bell-ringer and the man who chimed the Damiaatjes ; he knew all about the bells. He had no other hobby. Diderik offered to take him with him to the skittle-alley sometimes, but he always declined. Only a month or two ago his brother-in-law had invited him to go to the circus in Amsterdam, but he had pulled a long face as though the idea disgusted him. He wouldn't venture anywhere outside Haarlem. That was because he was timid, and afraid of anything he didn't know. If a customer who had never been in the shop before came in, he always left it to one of the others to serve him. Without doubt he was a lad who not only needed watching, but also needed the support of someone stronger. And Gerbrand was there to take care of him.

He sprinkled sand on the ink, blew it off, and gathered up his accounts. Before he went upstairs he drew the blind on one side and stood for a moment in front of the dark window looking out.

When he came down at daybreak, the daily woman was on her knees in front of the stove. She merely turned her head and said : ' Good morning, Werendonk, the baby's arrived, thank God. I only wish Stien hadn't heard that noise in the yard just last night. There's no need to be afraid of anything if your trust is in the Lord, but to hear old women cackling in the yard, when there can't be any old women there, that's not good. You never can tell what lies hidden in the future. And whatever way you look at it, it's not nice to be thinking of eerie things just when a child's beginning its life.'

He told her not to talk rubbish, and took down his cap and his coat from the peg. From the shop he could hear her talking to Frans, who had come down, and beginning to tell him about the strange sounds the maid-servant had heard in the yard. He went out in the dim morning light ; he saw at once that he would have to walk carefully for the uneven cobble-stones were slippery ; it was freezing and along the front steps there was a white line. It must be colder than he himself felt it to be. Just in front of him there was a milkman who had pulled the flaps of his cap over his ears, and at the end of Little Houtstraat a man was standing beating his

arms on his chest. The window-panes were frosted over, and on the Gracht the trees were stiff with the first frost. In the Market Square, still deserted at this hour, it was easier to see how heavily laden the sky was, lowering dark over the snow-covered roofs : one could feel the oppression of it.

His sister lived in one of the houses of the gentry in Kruisstraat. His brothers seemed to be proud of the fact that she had married into a higher class, but Gerbrand considered the distinction negligible between earning one's bread behind a counter and at an office desk, and actually he didn't like the idea that Agnete, the daughter of a humble shop-keeper, should be addressed as Mrs. Berkenrode. But that was the custom. If you lived in Great Houtstraat you expected to be called "Mr." ; if you lived in Gierstraat, you made no pretensions to a title before your surname ; yet you might both sell tobacco, the only difference being in the amount of money in the till. And this branch of the Berkenrodes had always held their heads very high, particularly when plenty of money was flowing into their coffers.

The wide front-door, with its scrolls and gleaming paint, stood open, the maid had just taken in the bread from the baker. ' Yes,' she said, ' all is well, Werendonk, the nurse says that the mistress has had a good night. The master isn't up yet, I'm to give the key to the cashier.'

‘Very good,’ he said, ‘then I’ll leave a message. Will you ask my brother-in-law to send his boy to let me know what time I have to be at the town hall for the registration?’

He made his way back, he ate his breakfast and began his day’s work. Before the voices of the school-children could be heard on the street, the snow was falling more thickly, in tiny flakes that whirled slowly, and within an hour the tiles on the roof were thinly coated with white. When the maid-servant had laid the table for the morning coffee, Gerbrand said he would go now, otherwise he would be too late for the registration. In Kruisstraat he was shown into the dining-room; he could hear the sound of visitors making merry in the drawing-room. Behind the stove stood four bottles of wine. His grand brother-in-law had big ideas. At last Berkenrode came into the room, boisterous and bustling as usual, saying that he had urgent business. After receiving the congratulations and thanking for them, he asked Werendonk to come back in the afternoon, as he had unexpected guests.

‘Aren’t you going to register the child at once then?’

‘Oh, that’s all over,’ he said airily. ‘Two of my friends were the witnesses.’

‘But that’s not right. As head of the family, I should have been a witness, and Diderik. You

ought not to have done that, and pass us over. Your friends are only strangers, and if it came to it, it would be among us that your child would find his friends.'

His brother-in-law excused himself, saying he hadn't wanted to take Gerbrand from his work, and that it had been easier to do as he had done.

'It was deliberate,' answered the other, without hiding his annoyance. It was not the first time that he had been treated inconsiderately. 'Berkenrode,' he said, giving him his hand, 'we won't quarrel about it, that wouldn't be becoming on this joyful occasion, and for the child's sake, too, we mustn't do it. When your visitors have gone I'll come back, and I hope you won't forget me at the christening.'

In the passage he heard the baby's voice ; he stood still and looked up the staircase. Then he said goodbye to his brother-in-law, turning back on the threshold to say : ' May the Lord bless your child.'

The pavement was white now. In the Market Square he could hear the shouts of the children as they came out of school, exuberant but muffled ; they were romping with one another, their satchels on their backs, and the snowballs were flying in all directions, so that women had to guard their heads, and the drayman's horse took fright. High up

above the bells in the Tower began to chime. He stood still for a moment to watch the gambols of the children in the snow. And he couldn't help thinking of the words his father had written in that little book.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BEHAVIOUR OF HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW MIGHT have aroused his distrust sooner, if Werendonk had not been conscious of the fact that he was suspicious by nature, and therefore always tried to suppress his dark doubts. There had already been rumours about Berkenrode, talk of crooked dealings, but he had attributed them to envy and slander, for dishonesty about money was so remote from himself that it was the last thing he would suspect in anyone else. But before the year came to an end he began to feel uneasy.

Shortly after his marriage Berkenrode had asked him for the loan of a sum of money, promising to return it on a specified day in December, and Werendonk had had to insist on this condition, since only a part of the sum belonged to himself, the other part he held in trust for his two brothers and his eldest sister. It was an amount that a business house as well known as Berkenrode's could easily guarantee. When, on the appointed day, Werendonk called and asked for the money, it was perfectly clear to him that his brother-in-law was

dissembling when he said that it had completely escaped his memory. And when, after a week, he had still not received it, he asked himself why such a sum was not being paid. With this thought suspicion took possession of his mind and increased rapidly for, in a short time, his brother-in-law was going from bad to worse.

Early in the New Year his sister Agnete came and said she wanted to speak to him alone in the back-parlour. She asked for money, saying that her husband had so many bills to meet that he was not able to give her enough. 'So long as he is paying everyone his due,' said Gerbrand, 'that's all right, I hope he'll continue to do so.' The very same day he heard from Diderik that his sister had been complaining that her husband had to go to Amsterdam every day, she thought he must have worries, though he said nothing about them. 'And why does he have to go to Amsterdam every day?' asked Gerbrand.

Suspicion soon crystallised. His neighbour, Wouters, came up to him in the street and said: 'It's a very sad thing for your sister, and she married such a short time. Yesterday morning they brought your brother-in-law home from Amsterdam in a cab, and my assistant wasn't the only one who saw that he couldn't stand on his legs. The whole town knows about his wild goings-on over there. As his elder you ought to have a word with him.'

Yes, he thought to himself, I ought, if what my neighbour gives me to understand is correct, but it might easily be a calumny, and it's not my business to give my brother-in-law a talking to for overstepping the bounds just once.

After that the boy came with a message asking him to go to Kruisstraat at once. He expected that the debt was going to be repaid, but Berkenrode told him that he was in great trouble because some bills of exchange, which he showed him, had been returned unpaid ; he asked him for a sum of money, he said it wasn't much and should be returned in a few days' time.

'Look here, brother-in-law,' he said, 'I don't understand your bills of exchange. Being the New Year, I happen to have that amount in the house, but I, too, have payments to make, and there won't be any surplus. We must help each other, but mark you, if you give me your word, you must keep to it and carry it out. You can have the money till Tuesday.'

He went away and returned with the money, because he considered it his duty to stand by a relative in difficulties. But he feared that there must be something wrong with a business that could be embarrassed for the sake of a few hundreds. On the Monday he had to go to Amsterdam to interview wholesalers, and in the coffee-house he saw his brother-in-law with a party of friends, drunk

and rowdy. On the following day when he went to collect his money, and it was not forthcoming, a quarrel ensued in which he reproached Berkenrode, not only with untrustworthiness, but with his conduct. He left without taking leave of him, and that evening he sat at table with puckered brows ; his two brothers looked at each other in surprise. They did not know how dark his thoughts were in his anxiety for his sister, nor how he was controlling his anger, both then and in the days that followed, for he gave no sign except his dark looks, and went about his business, talking calmly with customers. ' Brother,' Frans asked him once, ' why are you so quiet ? You remind me of father sometimes, when you look so black.' He received no answer.

Then Berkenrode, in despair, was driven to ask him for help once more. He came one evening when Werendonk was sitting alone over his accounts ; he didn't take his hat off, but came to the point at once, speaking hurriedly. He couldn't explain what his business difficulties were, but he must have money within the next two days, a large sum this time, otherwise he would probably not be able to keep his head above water ; it wasn't his fault, circumstances were against him. Werendonk saw the fear in his eyes. He asked how he was to raise the money. He could borrow it, said his brother-in-law, by mortgaging his house. Werendonk stood up ; the other saw that his face was red,

and his eyes gleamed in the light of the lamp beside him. 'Have things gone so far with you,' he asked, 'that you can think I should embezzle property which is in my charge, and add my fraud to your fraud? Pay your debts, the others first, for I will not press you. Don't squander other people's property, you are robbing them by your wild ways and drunkenness. Try to behave honourably.'

'You speak as though I were a thief,' said the other; 'well then, let come what will; you are driving me to despair, but you will rue it.'

His chest heaved, the breath puffed from his mouth. Werendonk noticed how cold the room was. He saw despair in the bowed head, the feet that lagged as they neared the door, but there was a weight on his heart that prevented him from stretching out his hand to help. Honour bade him withstand his inclination. It was too late to change his mind when Berkenrode, as he reached the step leading into the shop, said to him: 'A low hypocrite, that's what you are.' The front-door was banged so violently that the bell above it tinkled. Werendonk went on with his work, but his calculations were continually interrupted by uneasy thoughts about his sister and the trouble which was threatening her.

Then his brothers came home, earlier than usual, with a piece of news that made him clench his fist. The Amsterdam carrier and his man had been saying

that they frequently saw Berkenrode with a woman of the type to be seen in dance-halls. They had said it was disgraceful, and if Werendonk wished they could point out to him the house where his brother-in-law spent more time than in his own home. 'Things are in a bad way,' he said; 'a heavy trial is in store for Agnete and for us.'

And it seemed that his brothers had heard even more, but they hadn't wanted to speak of it, for they had seen how worried he was. They had thought it better to keep quiet about it, there was enough to be ashamed of already.

Werendonk had one more meeting with his brother-in-law which was to remain in his memory. It took place one morning, in the cold rain, in the square outside the station, where he had gone to enquire about some goods. A cab came driving up to the entrance, and Berkenrode stepped from it with a travelling-bag; they stood face to face. Werendonk said: 'It looks as though you're fleeing from the consequences of your conduct.' He saw that his brother-in-law turned very pale, his eyes were big with fear, his mouth was open. Suddenly he seized his bag and, without answering, he went into the station.

Then the disaster occurred that brought years of sorrow in its train. Frans came rushing in just at the time when the Damiaatjes begin to ring; he

couldn't utter a word, he seized his brother by the arm, pulling to show him that he was to come with him. Their sister had received news that Berkenrode had died in a hotel in Spa. They went to Kruisstraat, and Werendonk stood speechless looking at his sister ; his brothers sat weeping over her sorrow, but he stared with wide-open eyes. After a short time he said : ' The future can wait, we must think of what is to be done now.' He decided that his brothers should accompany him to pay their last respects, as was fitting, and he sent a message to the cashier to meet him at the office. Then the second disaster was disclosed to him. Bankruptcy proceedings had been instituted against the firm, and the cashier said that he thought that fraudulent dealings would be disclosed. He opened the safe and showed that it contained nothing of any value ; moreover, certain books had disappeared, but he could make a guess at what their clients' losses would amount to. ' We'll see to that in due course,' said Werendonk, ' our first duty is to his mortal remains.'

The three brothers went to Spa and followed the hearse to the churchyard. Then Werendonk went alone to the hotel to fetch Berkenrode's travelling-bag ; the proprietor accompanied him to the room where the guest had taken his life, and handed him a bill, amounting to a large sum, for the visit of two people. He paid without asking for an explana-

tion, and then he begged the proprietor to leave him alone for a moment.

He opened the bag and found in it an empty purse, an empty pocket-book, a few articles of clothing, including a nightshirt covered with blood-stains. He looked at it, folded it up and put it on one side. And if I had given him the money, he asked himself, would it have prevented this from happening?

He shut the bag and took it with him ; he left the shirt lying there in order to spare his sister the sight of it. When he got outside, he had the feeling that he had left something behind which would remain in his memory and, without knowing why, he found himself thinking of the little child.

Throughout the long journey the brothers sat in the railway-train in silence, looking out of the windows at the wet fields ; now and again, after looking at Gerbrand, the youngest would sigh. The former sat upright, motionless, his eyes fixed as though he were looking into himself. All through the long hours he had not uttered a word, but when the train steamed into the station and they were standing up, he said : ‘ Let us not forget, the son must not suffer for the iniquities of his father, and we are there to help him, for it is a heavy load that rests on his shoulders.’ In silence they passed along the dark streets on their way home, very few lights were still burning behind the windows.

The neighbours, who had seen Werendonk go out in the morning, watched him ; it seemed to them that he had grown slower, gravely absorbed. The town was still in a state of excitement over the scandal, for many people in humble circumstances had lost their small savings, but in that part of the street where Werendonk's shop was situated little was said about it. The neighbours knew that here the heaviest disaster was not the loss of money, but the loss of honour which had to be borne by a man of spotless integrity. No one in the neighbourhood had a doubt as to how he would behave, and Werendonk was looked up to with increased respect.

He went to his sister's, and after he had told her about their journey and the grave, he laid his hand on her shoulder and said ; ' Now for a word between you and me ; it's hard, but it has to be said. When your husband died, the bankruptcy had not yet been filed, therefore, in the eyes of the world, he had not been dishonoured while he was alive. But that makes no difference. He has robbed others, widows and orphans, and he has sacrificed more than his own honour. You will not be able to bear it if your child is pointed at in the town because of his father's guilt, and you are only a weak widow, you can do nothing about it. We, your brothers, will take it upon us, and Petronella, too, can help if her husband agrees. The debts shall be paid off, no one will be able to say anything

against your child ; from now on I am his father. It's only right I should be, for I, too, my conscience tells me, have guilt to expiate because I did not stand by him to the last. You will have to leave this house, but you'll find all you need with us, meagre though it may be.'

She was his stepsister, and there was twelve years difference in their ages, and he had always had authority over the younger ones. She said, ' You will be rewarded for taking care of the child.'

Then he went to the Court to make enquiries. And he wrote to his own sister in Schoonhoven, asking her to come with her husband in order that a conference might be held and an important decision made. She was older than he was, married to a baker, and was weak and delicate. When they arrived, he arranged for them all to meet one evening in the parlour ; he closed the shop and gave each one a place at the table ; he turned up the wick of the lamp. And when all were seated he spoke to them : ' I will tell you briefly how matters stand, without digressing or making reproaches against anyone. I can't tell you what sin is, but we all know, if we look into our hearts, that we are corrupt. Therefore let us throw no stones, but simply do what God expects of us. This is the position : Our brother-in-law has robbed his neighbours, plundered widows and orphans. His child ought not to suffer for his transgression, as it is

written, but the world decrees otherwise. Men will say—Look, there goes the boy whose father brought misfortune on us. Berkenrode has no family, therefore the child belongs to us, and it is our responsibility to cleanse from him the stains of fraud and dishonour. That is our duty. Is there anyone who does not agree?’

He looked at each in turn ; all were silent. Then he took a paper out of his pocket, unfolded it and told them, as quietly as though he were speaking to a customer across the counter, that the debts left by their brother-in-law, most of them owed to people who were now in want, amounted to fifty thousand guilders. He had made up his mind to lay aside all he could save to pay off these debts, and he asked which of them was ready to do the same.

‘ Well, brother-in-law,’ said the husband of his eldest sister, ‘ doing your duty is going to lay a superhuman task on your shoulders. Have you calculated that, with the profit you make, you will have to be paying all your life long ? And, supposing we all contribute our share, how long is it going to take, even then ? We are people of moderate means, and the sum you mention is a fortune.’

‘ How long it will take I cannot say, nor even whether we shall ever accomplish it, life is not in our hands. But if I did not do it, my sister would be the widow of a dishonoured man, of a transgressor of the law, her child would suffer the con-

sequences, and, though I can do but little, I cannot permit that.'

'That's understandable,' said Briel again, 'but have you considered another thing? Your step-brothers are still young men, and in the natural course of events they would choose themselves wives and have families. Then it will be a burden on them if they have to contribute from their earnings for the debts of another man.'

'I have thought of that,' was the answer. 'Diderik is hoping to get married within the year, and if the burden is too much for him then, he can lay it down. It is only if we wish to do it. We mustn't think of the money only; the debt we are speaking of is more than a question of mere guilders. Who will join with me?'

He pointed to Petronella. She nodded. Her husband said: 'Very well.' The two younger brothers nodded, and Frans jumped up from his chair because he wanted to go out.

'You know what you have undertaken,' said Werendonk. 'From now on every halfpenny will be saved, and not to enrich ourselves.'

Then they all went out and left him alone.

Under this burden, borne by his elders, the child began his life.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WHOLE TOWN HAD HEARD THAT THERE WAS nothing to be expected for the creditors out of the bankruptcy ; it was known in the small streets, for there it was that most of those who had lost their money lived, elderly people. And they had heard the story that the Werendonks were going to pay, but no one believed that, it was easy to calculate what they made in their shop, and, as for their savings, they had lost those just as much as anyone else. But his nearest neighbours, who knew Gerbrand Werendonk, said : ‘ Rest easy, he will do it.’ ‘ Maybe it was an impetuous idea on his part,’ said Wouters, the confectioner, ‘ but he’s the sort of man to keep his word, even though it means working all his long life for it.’

People noticed that he had grown slower, in his movements and in his speech, that he looked at things more closely, like a short-sighted person. He greeted people so curtly that no one began a conversation with him. And anyone who came into the shop could see that he was master there, when he spoke it was a command.*

His two brothers and Agnete, all more than ten years younger than himself, had always regarded him as superior to themselves, and were accustomed to do as he wished. But he had never watched them as closely as he did now. However little Diderik wasted when he was measuring, it was seen. If Frans had been a bit longer than usual over his sifting in the shed, because he had sat thinking of something else, his brother could say to the minute what time he had begun. Agnete, who in the short period of her well-to-do life had grown somewhat careless about housekeeping, had to hear again and again that something different was expected here. It was not only that he was master in the house, he was a strict master. And if one of them suggested to him that it wasn't after all so terrible to waste something that couldn't be used in any case, he answered: 'One useless thing is nothing, but ten may be useful. One single bean is negligible, but twenty are worth a farthing, and every farthing represents a part of our duty, I don't need to tell you that.' Then he would make a quick gesture to denote that there had been enough of talk and that the work must continue.

He had much more accountancy to do than before, so much that it was past midnight when he got to bed. In the old days, often he used to stand on the front steps looking out for a few minutes, but now, even before the shop was closed, he would put

his papers and books on the table. And when the day's takings had been entered, he did sums and puzzled over the amounts of the debts, it was a troublesome business so to arrange things that each one received a share with due consideration of his need. He had interviewed all the creditors and come to an understanding with them. There were some who had lost everything and had to live on what the Werendonks could share out, they had the right to be helped first. What could be saved by thrift, added to what they used normally to put by, was barely enough to provide these people with a meagre weekly dole ; the less needy had to wait. All this kept him fully occupied. When he stopped to think for a moment because he couldn't see his way clearly, it worried him perpetually to hear Agnete's sighs as she sat with her knitting at the other side of the table. Then he would look at her, but he said nothing. The crying of the child, too, in the room above disturbed him. In the daytime he took no notice, although its voice was heard a lot—the daily woman said she had never known such a restless baby. But in the evenings, when the house was quiet and he had to concentrate on head-work, it made him impatient. Every evening as soon as the Damiaatjes began to chime the child started crying ; it had begun to do this soon after it was born, and it didn't seem to be losing the habit. During that half-hour, therefore, he

merely looked through the books, a less exacting task, and all the time, up above, he could hear the inconsolable screaming, the gentle hush-hush of his sister, and the sound of her feet as she walked up and down. With the last stroke of the clock the cries abated, and a moment later Agnete would come down again and, with a sigh, take her place at the table. He said nothing but immediately began on the work that required more concentration. They sat in silence until the clock struck ten, then she left him alone. Later his brothers came home and he said no more than "good-night" to them, so as not to be distracted.

Very soon they grew much busier ; within a week or two their custom had increased. All the inhabitants of the street and of the side-streets between the Kampervest and the Gracht, now that they knew how the profits were being disposed of, considered it their duty to deal with Werendonks and thereby to make their contribution towards helping the needy victims. Well-to-do people who lived farther off, too, sent word to him that he could call for orders every morning. At first he used to send Frans to do the errands, but very soon he realised that he couldn't manage without him at home, so he employed a lad, the son of one of the creditors. They had to lay in larger stocks. They became so busy that they had to keep the shop open later at nights, and, as he had his accounts to do then, he

arranged that his brothers should take it in turns to stay at home. Agnete, too, had to go behind the counter sometimes. Late customers could see Werendonk through the glass door, sitting in the back-parlour, his head bent under the lamp, and they knew well what he was doing, weighed down with anxiety, striving to repair the misdeeds of another, not allowing himself a moment's rest.

'That fellow Werendonk,' they used to say, 'is different from his father, he doesn't think of himself. But he's too severe with his brothers, they're kept on too tight a rein.'

And when the increase in business persisted, so that sometimes five or six people had to wait their turns, his next-door neighbour advised him to take on an assistant, since it couldn't but be to his advantage to serve people more quickly. But he thought that his brothers could easily work harder, there was no need for them to go out in the evenings, Sunday was quite enough for a man who had a duty to fulfil. 'No,' said Wouters, 'you're making a mistake, it's easy to see that your brother Diderik has no heart in working after hours, and it's understandable he should want to visit his sweet-heart in the evenings.'

There were many more people about in that part of the street, the shop bell could be heard every moment, and this prosperity was regarded with pleasure. Naturally there were shopkeepers who

envied him and thought it unfair that customers should leave them in order to give Werendonk a chance to carry out the crazy task he had taken upon himself ; they said it was pride, to pay the debts of an unscrupulous man just because he had been his sister's husband. But, apart from those who were the losers by Werendonk's prosperity, there was no one who did not speak of him with respect. And those who saw him setting out on Saturdays, punctually at twelve o'clock, before he had his own dinner, walking slowly with a basket on his arm, knew that here was a man with a stricter conception of what was right than many another. Then he would begin his journey through the town to the houses of the creditors who were in the poorest circumstances, so that they should have money in time to do their shopping ; and in cases of extreme poverty he would give them a bag of flour as well, not out of charity, as he would say, but because they had a right to it, and he could give no more in money. And he made each one of them write down carefully in a book the amount he had paid off.

He was so completely absorbed by this task that he thought of nothing else, and did not observe how discontented his brothers were growing. When it came to past nine o'clock and the bells of St. Bavo were ringing, Frans grew impatient and hurried over his work ; he made mistakes in measuring, he

scarcely answered when a customer addressed him. As soon as the shop was at last shut, even though it was after half-past ten, he would seize his cap and go out. Once his brother had noticed it and said : ' Why don't you stay at home ? It's much too late to go out.' And Frans had answered : ' I know, but I'm going all the same.' Gerbrand didn't notice the tone of voice or grasp the significance of this answer. But the other brother didn't offer such mild resistance as the youngest. He gave no answers, but Gerbrand, absorbed in his work, couldn't see the expression on his face, and when, arriving home after midnight, he had to give an account of himself, he said : ' I'll do as I please,' and banged the door after him. He's old enough to look after himself, thought Gerbrand, but he didn't realise that his brother had ceased to obey him.

It came as a surprise to him when he discovered it. It was a Sunday evening in June, the lamp was not yet lighted, and he sat at his accounts, for he was forced by necessity to break the law of the Sabbath rest. Diderik, who had been a long time preparing to go out, came quietly into the room, drew a chair up to the table and sat down. Gerbrand looked at him in amazement. ' It's time we had a talk,' he said. ' I'm twenty-seven and I refuse to be treated as a child any longer. You're always too busy to think of anything else, but you might as well know that we've made up our minds

to get married in the New Year. You'll have to engage an assistant then in any case. But it would be just as well for you to do it at once, for if I'm to be in the shop by half-past seven in the morning, I've had enough of it by the evening. You can count on it that from now on I shall consider myself free at seven o'clock. And you needn't ask what I'm up to, that's my affair. And take my advice, don't stretch the bow too far with Frans either, one day or another you'll have him chucking the whole show.'

This was something new. He thought it over. 'That means a change in things,' he said. 'Less work, less to be put aside for the debts. You don't seem to understand that it isn't the debts of Berkenrode we are discharging, but of our sister and her child. And if you do realise it and don't want to co-operate, that's your own business.'—'Of course I'll co-operate,' said Diderik, 'but not beyond my powers. Very soon I shall have my own home, then I shall have to think of myself.' With that he left the house.

Gerbrand took this much to heart, and thought that it was nothing but selfishness that made Diderik unwilling to work late in the evening. He couldn't believe Frans would act like that, for the boy had agreed to give up his pocket-money and never seemed to need anything. But he distrusted even him now. He even suspected Agnete of discontent.

He watched their work more closely, he often detected them in carelessness, and his rebukes became sharper.

His sister was terrified by his voice sometimes. She dared not stay upstairs with the child when there was pressure in the shop, she was kept busy then till the light was put out, although she was tired out and her head ached from her disturbed nights ; and after that she had to sit down to mending. Once, as she stood up to go upstairs, he looked up and said : ‘ It’s a heavy burden, I know, but you must consider what would be the consequences if we didn’t shoulder it. It’s not only the disgrace of his father’s sin on the child ; it might be worse than that. We have to keep him free from evil, so that later he, in his turn, will not oppress the needy, and rob, and misappropriate securities. That would be far worse for you than a life of hard work.’

With tears in her eyes she said : ‘ Yes, may I be preserved from that. You will never hear a complaint from me about the work. The child is not to blame for anything.’

‘ That makes it all the harder for us. For, nevertheless, the sins will be visited on him. Don’t forget that when you think that too much is being demanded of you. Go to bed now, I hope the child will let you have some rest tonight.’

She sighed, whispered good-night and went away resignedly. Then, although she was not disturbed

by the child, she lay sleepless, as on so many nights, and thought of her misery. And above all her thoughts was the figure of her brother, heavy, dark, with steady, deep-set eyes. Just such a picture she had seen as a child when they used to tell her about the prophets.

After a while she had to get up again and light the candle because the child was restless and began to cry ; she walked cautiously on her toes, so that the boards should not creak, anxious to still the noise, lest her brother should be wakened and reminded of the child. She took it in her arms, rocked it and adjusted its little garments, and all the time she was thinking of her brother. They had to work, day in day out, to repair the wrong that had been done, she knew that well, but sometimes she feared that all these sleepless nights were too much for her strength. Except to go to church on Sundays, she never went outside the house.

The youngest brother was the only one who observed that she was growing pale and had red eyes. One night he came in quietly and said : ' Let me walk up and down with the baby. Then you can have some sleep.' She didn't want to let him do it, and they disputed about it, but in whispers, so that their brother in the adjoining room shouldn't hear. They often talked in hushed tones, in the passage, or in the kitchen, without realising why it was they spoke so quietly.

Frans's voice had never been heard much in the house, but he had grown much more retiring and timid of being noticed. Jansje was the only person he talked to. With the old servant, who from his babyhood had always loved him best of all the Werendonks, he could be talkative ; he was quick to see, too, if there was anything he could do to help her. When she had asked him to clean the topmost panes for her, because when she was so high up on the ladder it made her giddy, or if he was doing anything else that was too hard for her, he would often burst out laughing at the things she said. But otherwise he was quiet, not even his footsteps could be heard.

His eldest brother had noticed that he still went out in the evening, although at that hour there could be nothing to see in the town. On one occasion the clock in the Tower had struck one and Frans was not yet home. It was quiet and warm, the window stood open. This must come to an end, he thought, this lounging about will lead to no good. Frans came in and was preparing to go upstairs, but his brother held up his hand and said : ' I want to have a word with you. What are you doing to stay out after midnight ? '

' I walked by the Spaarne for a bit, first on this side and then on the other, and then beyond the town for a little ; in this warm weather it's so fresh by the water and under the trees. It was after

half-past ten before I was able to get out, brother, and standing all day in the shop I get such a dry throat.'

'There's nothing against your going out for half an hour or so.' He talked to him for more than a quarter of an hour, pointing out to him that aimless loafing could only lead to harmful consequences, that it was so easy to fall into bad company—all this in admonitory tones with references to the Proverbs and the Book of Ecclesiastes. Frans nodded his head all the time without lifting his eyes from the ground. When he concluded with the words : 'Don't forget,' Frans said : 'I can't give it up. You and I are different, and I can't stay indoors all the time. You shall never have any reason to complain of my work, but leave me my freedom to go out in the open air.'

Gerbrand looked at him and controlled himself. 'I won't speak in anger,' he said, 'you're a puzzle to me, but don't let me see you getting into bad ways.'

The following day he did not wish him good-morning and did not speak to him except to give him orders. Frans felt that he was being punished and that he deserved it, his voice was heard even less than usual, and he came timidly to take his place at table. In the evening he said : 'Brother, you're right, I won't stay out longer than half an hour or so.'

In October, when the other brother was having his banns called, Gerbrand decided that he would be justified in taking on an assistant. 'Look,' he said to Diderik, 'I have taken your advice, because in justice to you it is impossible to do otherwise now. And here in this book you can see what your share was in the business and in the money that was left to us, what we lost at the time of the bankruptcy, and what has been done with the profits since then. You have a right to your portion, and if I have to give it to you now, I shall have to sell the house. You know what all the money that can be saved is being used for. Judge for yourself what you ought to do.'

Diderik, who had previously decided that he wouldn't be able in future to contribute to the debts, answered: 'You are right, as men of honour we have a duty, a duty, too, to Agnete and her child, and until that is fulfilled we cannot rest. On Saturdays I will give you as much as I can afford, it won't be much, for the business doesn't belong to me, but to my parents-in-law. And of course you'll put down what I give you as my share of the payments.'

So at last his convictions were justified, and he knew that his stepbrothers and stepsister were people who would fulfil the promise they had given, even though it should bind them for a lifetime.

Diderik left the house, and the assistant was given

his bed, beside that of the youngest brother, up in the attic.

Then followed a winter of trouble with the child. It cried incessantly, once even through a whole night and day on end. The daily woman said that it wasn't only from teething, but there were some children who were possessed. The maid had to get up in the night to relieve Agnete and to soothe the child, walking up and down with it, rocking it in her arms, a dummy in its mouth. Their neighbour, Sanne, advised them to lance its gums ; the child bled and screamed all the louder. Nothing availed. One afternoon, when some customers who were waiting shook their heads, the screaming up above sounded so terrible, Frans went up to the bedroom. His sister had thrown herself on the bed, her eyes were closed, she was pale as death, tears were rolling down her cheeks. He lifted the child out of the cradle, and as it was cold he held it in his arms between his coat and his shirt. It sobbed a little longer and then was quiet. He walked up and down with it like this for a while, soothing it and gently patting its little legs ; then he tried to put it down in the cradle again, for at this time of day they were busy in the shop, but it began again and stretched its hands out to him. He took it up once more, tinkled the bells on its rattle, and stood in front of the window. The child heaved a sigh and closed its eyes. He stood there so long that the lamp was

lighted in the butcher's shop. He dared not stay away any longer ; he laid it carefully down under the coverlets, but he had scarcely closed the door behind him when its voice was raised again, pitiful and weak now. The crying went on, it could be heard in the other shops. And, as the maid had told them before supper that Mrs. Berkenrode had decided to stay in bed, Frans ate his meal hurriedly and went upstairs again, and once more peace was restored. He walked up and down while the child looked at the candle, or at his shadow on the wall, until the Damiaatjes began to chime. He thought it would begin to cry now, for it always did at that sound, but he saw a smile on its face, and that made him so happy that he pressed it close in his arms. And at each chime he said ' Ding-dong ' ; he loved the sound so much himself, and he would never be able to go to the Market Square at nine o'clock any more. But if the little creature could smile at it, it was good to listen to it here too. Then the maid came to tell him he was wanted in the shop.

All through the winter the child was troublesome, and its screams were continually heard, and many a time during the day, and at night too, Frans would go and take his sister's place, for she was ailing and suffered from headaches, her troubles were too much for her. Nothing she did for the child was of any avail, but when it heard the stairs creaking

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it seemed to know already that he was coming, and then it would be quiet. And very soon it was the regular thing for him to nurse it in his arms for a while every evening at nine o'clock.

When the spring came, it was he, too, who taught Floris to stand and to walk. He tied a strap under his arms and played at gee-gees, stamping with his feet. And to teach him to walk alone, after one o'clock, when he could spare a quarter of an hour, he would carry him into the yard, where the apple-tree was just coming into bloom. He would stand Floris up against the trunk, while he himself would squat on his heels in front of him with his arms spread out and make little leaps backwards. The child crowed with delight, and Stien and Jansje, busy at their pots and pans, peeped through the kitchen window. It didn't matter if the child fell, still there would be the sound of laughter. Frans lifted it high up to the blossoms so that it blinked its eyes.

Even Gerbrand began to notice the child now, it amused him to see it, when it hardly reached as high as his knees, clinging to his trousers and trampling over his big boots. Then he would stroke its head and say to Agnete : ' He's growing into a nice little fellow, don't worry.'

But it had to be perpetually watched, it clutched at everything it could reach in the room, the ink-pot was pulled from the table, the floor was black, the chairs stained. Sometimes Gerbrand raised his

voice and held up his finger. Then the child would look at him and immediately clutch again at what it had been forbidden to touch. Then he had to take it by the shoulder and give it a slap. It took no notice of his reprimands. He said that it looked as though Floris did on purpose what he was forbidden to do ; he had told him many times already not to climb on the chair by the side-table and touch the statuettes, charming heirlooms, more than eighty years old by now, or to pull the Bible towards him ; and repeatedly he would find him on that very chair. He said the boy was not to be left alone in the parlour but kept in the kitchen. Although the other uncle had to forbid him sometimes, Gerbrand's manner of doing it was something quite different. When Frans forbade something and was disobeyed, his voice was not stern and he didn't become even more severe and hold up his finger. But from Gerbrand the child learnt which were the forbidden things. And when his hands nonetheless stretched out towards them, Gerbrand said that was original sin, the disobedience which leads man to his fall.

When the child could walk, Frans took him with him one day when he had to go out on an errand. Floris saw the street, the blue front steps, the round cobble stones, the milkman's dog, the gleaming window-panes of the shops, and, high up above, the strip of blue sky and the sun. After this first day

he always wanted to go with Frans. But when Gerbrand took him by the hand to go out, he began to scream and flung himself on the ground. Gerbrand never did it again.

It was his youngest uncle who taught him his first games, it was Frans who taught him to speak. That very summer, one afternoon under the green trees of the Old Gracht, the child said what for Frans was his first word. 'Ding-dong,' he said suddenly, just like the Damiaatjes. Frans couldn't help laughing softly, and he took the boy's little fist in his hand. Then he began to repeat other words to him.

In the autumn Floris ran out of the shop by himself. And after that his disobedience, too, began to increase. Stien had to stand at the door and clap her hands. Frans ran after him, and when he was brought back he heard the voice of his eldest uncle. He got into the habit of looking more at that uncle than at the others. And Jansje remarked : 'You'll have trouble with him, he looks out of his eyes so defiantly.'—'The rod shall not be spared,' answered Werendonk. 'He will learn what transgression is.'

And so it came about that, when Floris was just three years old, Werendonk fetched from the attic a Spanish cane, which had been used for himself, and it was stood in the corner next to the side-board. 'I will be the castigator,' he said to Agnete, 'and I

shall be feared, but I will take that upon myself, for I bear the responsibility.'

But he found in Floris a child who had a will of his own and often had to be beaten, because the impulse that drove him was stronger than the fear of punishment. At first it was fear and pain that made him scream, then pain alone, but when he was a little older he screamed, and kicked, too, in protest. And on the very same day he would commit the same fault. 'Yes,' sighed his mother, 'he is a troublesome child. Oh, brother, mightn't it be better to treat him with kindness?'—'By severity,' was the answer, 'and only by severity will evil inclinations be suppressed. Today it's naughtiness, tomorrow it's the downward path.'

Before the boy was five years old he knew that he did wrong, and that somewhere there was injustice.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVERYBODY IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD KNEW HIM TO be an unmanageable child, and some said he should be treated this way, others that way, but on one point there was no disagreement, and that was that all the good done by the elder Werendonk was ruined by the younger. He seemed to be no more than a child himself. Floris had been seen at the Forest Gate standing up to his knees in the horse-pond, where the horses were washed, and splashing the passers-by with water, while Frans, who had been sent out to find him, stood by, himself dripping wet, and laughed. How was a child to know what was wrong if one uncle punished him for things that the other saw no harm in? It was just the same about telling the truth. When Frans brought him home he would make something up in order to gloss over some escapade or another, and the boy learnt early that the commandment not to tell a lie didn't apply if he wanted to avoid a beating. Before he was old enough to go to school, his lips would curl at the corners when he told a lie. Gerbrand mistrusted that expression on the boy's

face, he suspected that he was lying, sometimes he was certain of it and gave him a beating. What he did not know was that for some time past the boy had been committing petty thefts—a carrot from a cart, a piece of liquorice from the sweet-shop, mere trifles, such as, he was ashamed to remember, Gerbrand himself had once been guilty of taking.

He had to be punished every day. He was allowed to play in their street, but not to go beyond it, and the neighbours' children would run after him as soon as they saw him. But when they began to play, there would be squabbling and fighting ; the girls walked away because he pushed them, and went to play somewhere else. At the end of a quarter of an hour he would be standing alone. But once he was at a distance he became an object of interest again, and, one after another, they drew near him, the games started afresh, until once more he began to punch and snatch their marbles from the weaker ones. They called him a cheat, though there were some of them who said that he gave away his sweets without keeping back any for himself. But never a morning passed without some mother complaining to Werendonk that Floris had pinched her child or torn its clothes. Complaints came, too, from farther away ; the order not to leave the street was disobeyed, and Werendonk had to punish him so often for this that he began to hold his tongue

about it. Not all the boys accompanied Floris, only those who were bigger than he was and got tired of playing with the younger ones. Then, one day, a poor woman from the Omvalspoort came, with tears in her eyes, saying that the boy had wilfully smashed one of her windows ; another time an old man from Gierstraat came, demanding compensation for a pot of paint that had been kicked over. And sometimes the damage that had been done cost several guilders. Werendonk paid the money and inflicted just punishment, never in anger. The daily woman and the servant-maid scolded him furiously for causing money to be flung away through his mischievousness ; the neighbours lost their tempers and said he was a disgrace ; even Frans said he'd have to keep a sharper eye on him : Werendonk merely repeated that doubtless he would grow out of it.

But no one in the house realised how difficult he sometimes found it to administer these chastisements. For the last few years Agnete's health had been failing, her cheeks were so hollow and transparent that often he would send her out of the shop to go and sit on her chair in the parlour ; occasionally she protested, but sometimes she felt so tired she couldn't stand up. Once, when Floris was about eight years old, she was sitting thus when Werendonk came into the room leading the boy by the hand to punish him. He laid him across his knee and the stick

came down with slow regular strokes. He looked at Agnete and saw that she had not moved ; she was sitting in the same position, her face lifted, the sunlight shining into her faded eyes. It filled him with compassion to see her thus, as though she were unmoved, whereas he knew how much it grieved her. He sent the boy away, he sat down beside her, saying : ‘ You mustn’t think that it doesn’t grieve me. I have adopted him as my own son, and it is hard to see his faults growing worse instead of improving. Sin is born in us, never have I realised that so well as now that I see it in a young child. Call it what you like, fibbing or lying, it’s the beginning of sin.’ Agnete did not turn her face towards him, she asked : ‘ How does a child come by it ? It’s not taught to him here. How does sin get into a person ? ’

Shrugging his shoulders and saying : ‘ Who can tell ? ’ he stood up. He looked at her again, he saw that she was still staring in front of her and he realised that this immobility signified a deeper grief than sighs and tears. ‘ You ought to go out a bit,’ he said, ‘ it would do you good to have an airing these fine evenings.’ She only shook her head.

At first Werendonk didn’t notice that he hesitated when he had to inflict a punishment. First he looked at his sister to see if she had heard anything. Then, with the object of sparing her, he would take

the boy into the kitchen or to the little shed. Floris felt that the big hand that held him had become gentler.

One day, during this same summer, a change came over that hand. It was Saturday. Werendonk was taking off his apron ready to go out to make his payments. Looking out of the window to where the footsteps of the children, just out of school, could be heard racing along the cobbled street, he at once perceived Thijs's wife, and the child she was holding by the arm was wearing a blue jacket. He felt his anger rising as he wondered what the complaint was going to be now. Letting go of the boy on the front steps, she told Werendonk the story of what he had done. Not only had he stolen, she said in a loud and angry voice, but he had behaved like a sneak. The baker's boy had dropped his purse in the street, and Floris had been one of those who had gone to help pick up the money, but she had noticed that he had picked up a ten-cent piece, whereas he had only handed over a cent. Werendonk found the ten cents in his pocket; he took him immediately to the shed. 'My boy,' he said, 'don't you know that a thief has to go to prison?' Floris gave no answer but looked straight at him with his small grey eyes. Werendonk had not taken the cane with him, he was going to beat him with his hand, and as he bent down to him, he, too, looked straight at the boy. Then, turning him

round and laying him across his knee, he lifted his eyes to the little window and the blue sky. He felt how slender and delicate was the neck beneath his hand. His blows were slow and careful and he kept his eyes turned upwards. It was strange that at this moment all he could think of was blood, of a shirt stained with blood ; he could see it just as though it were lying there in front of him. His head grew hot ; he left off, and spoke quietly, in a voice in which there was no reproof, only grief : ‘ Never do that again, you don’t realise yet what wrong-doing is, but if you did you would think it terrible. Stolen goods leave an evil stain.’ His head sank till it nearly touched Floris, who left off crying, terrified at a dark look in his uncle’s eyes he had never seen there before. He walked away until he was standing beside the stack of flour-bags—the eyes followed him. He lowered his own, his lips quivered, but he could not say anything.

When Werendonk went out with his basket on his arm, people noticed that he was deep in thought, his face was turned up towards the white clouds, a smile lighted it. He returned in just the same way, looking up, his face illuminated. He sat alone at his dinner, the others had gone back to the shop. When Agnete came in and stood beside him to ask him something, he said : ‘ Don’t worry about him, I’ll see to it that the good in him wins. Tell him that he’s forgiven and that he may go to

the Forest with Steven Wouters.' She looked in surprise at the kind smile on his face and said : ' Thank you.'

There were crowds of customers that Saturday evening, but punctually at nine o'clock he sent Agnete to her chair to rest and stayed longer in the shop himself. When he was able to begin his evening's work on the books, Agnete was reading the Bible. He felt in a more cheerful mood than he had been in for a long time. He's only a child still, he thought as he was spreading his accounts out on the table. And he recalled the feeling of the slender neck under his hand. When Frans came to ask if he could go out now that Gerrit could manage alone in the shop, he answered : ' Have a good walk, the air will be fresh by the Spaarne.' His sister had stayed up later than was her custom ; she laid the Bible on the side-table and stood up to bid him good-night. He said : ' I think Floris ought to go to another school. He's good at his books. I'll go and have a talk to the master at the Jacobijnstraat School.'

' But that is a school for young gentlemen,' she said.

' And may not a Werendonk child go there ? ' He realised at once what he had said, but Agnete was too tired, she merely answered that he probably knew best, and left the room.

When he was alone, he thought, it's all because

something came into my mind that I had almost forgotten.

The following week the Fair opened, and every afternoon Floris was given five cents for the merry-go-round. 'Your uncle's growing generous,' said the daily woman. He even went himself one day to have a look at the stalls along the Old Gracht. The sky looked so bright over the trees that he smiled and said to his neighbour, Wouters, who was standing there, too, looking at his youngest on one of the horses: 'Yes, let them have a good time while they're young.' All through the Fair week he was so good-tempered that once or twice Frans went out before nine o'clock to have a look round.

It was noticed that during that month of August Floris gave no cause for complaint. He came home punctually and he obeyed promptly; they thought it was due to the companionship of Steven Wouters, with whom he went out to play every afternoon. There were other boys, too, and they got up to pranks, but if it got too bad he listened to Steven, who acted as his protector against the stronger boys. Often they went off by themselves, for Steven was interested in other things besides playing at robbers and throwing stones. That summer with him he discovered the Forest.

Hitherto he had been no farther than just beyond the Deer Park with Uncle Frans, on a Sunday or in the evening, to listen to the band. But that was

the Forest for the grown-ups. Now he came to the little paths in the great expanse between the Carriage Road and the ditch where you looked across to the meadows beside the Outer Spaarne ; he followed the tracks in the dense oak wood, known only to boys ; he gathered the flowers that grew tall in the shade. Here all he could hear was the rustling of the leaves overhead and their own voices which sounded soft ; he asked why there were round patches of sunlight on the moss, and Steven, looking up and following a ray of light, tried to find the source. They went down on their knees to watch the ants greeting each other as they passed, toiling, in passionate haste, to drag a dead wasp away. They put their fingers to their lips when they unexpectedly saw a bird mounting the bark of an oak-tree and tapping with its beak. From Steven he learnt how to cut a whistle out of a sprig of elder and to blow a high-pitched note on it that silenced the thristle ; they collected oak-apples to make ink from them ; they carved their name on a tree-trunk just as Laurens Coster had done. Sometimes they sat for a long time in the hemlock beside the ditch, looking so fixedly at the circles made by the water-spiders that they were startled at the sight of a cow that had been coming gradually nearer as she grazed, and now loomed up before them on the opposite bank so big that they could see a sail on the Outer Spaarne beneath her belly. And when Floris came

home his cheeks were fresh and rosy, his eyes were shining.

Before the end of the holidays, Uncle Gerbrand bought him a new satchel, a slate that folded up, and a pencil-box with a picture on it. He himself took him by the hand and accompanied him to the Jacobijnstraat School, where the head-master, who had a beard, was standing at the door. It was a different sort of school from the one at Groot Heiligh-land ; the boys spoke a different language, had different manners, most of them wore white collars. When he told them this at home, Uncle Gerbrand said his mother should buy a white collar for him too. Floris washed his hands, and didn't forget to clean his boots in the morning. 'You see,' said Werendonk to his sister, 'how much the boy has improved ?'

But within a few weeks Jansje noticed that the expression on his face had changed. He kept his eyes lowered, and if he was asked anything, he looked away. A note came from the master to ask why he hadn't been to school for a week. Werendonk spoke to him, patiently and kindly, but he gave no answer, and the cane, that had been standing idle in the corner for a long time, was used again. The assistant took him to school every day. His voice was no longer heard in the house, he stood mostly in the passage or in the shed, without playing. Frans, who watched him there once, unob-

served, heard him saying : ' Your father is a thief,' and he held his fist up to the wall as he said it. Frans began to whistle and, as though he had heard nothing, he said : ' Hullo, are you coming to help me with the peas?' But Floris ran away. And Frans sat bent over his work wondering what he could have meant by saying that his father was a thief; here at home nothing was ever said about Berkenrode having done anything. He wondered whether he ought to mention it, but soon he was thinking of something else.

On half holidays Floris ate his dinner quickly so as to get out. He didn't play any more with Steven, who went to the other school. He ran to the Drive, keeping pace with the tram-horse, and waited for Manuel, a dark-skinned boy, who wore shiny high boots and sat next to him at school. None of the other boys would play with Manuel, but he was always ready to give money or something else in return for being prompted in class, and Floris, whom the other boys hardly noticed either, was glad to take anything he could get from him. He didn't trust him and often was angry with him, but when it came to a fight he was cautious, for Manuel, though no stronger than Floris, had a trick of twisting his arm or kicking his shin.

In the bedroom Agnete found a hunting-knife, a Malayan dagger, cartridge-cases, a mother-of-pearl box, a tube of gun-powder, and many other things ;

he always said he had got them from his little friend in the Drive. He had a lot of sweets in his pocket, too, and never asked for a slice of bread-and-butter now.

This association lasted only a few months, from the winter until this little friend left the town. But in that time Floris had learnt things that would never have entered Uncle Gerbrand's head. He only found out from a confectioner, who showed him an unpaid bill amounting to many guilders for sweetmeats that the young gentleman, always accompanied by Floris, had had from his shop. He couldn't be punished for this, he could only be forbidden to associate with boys of that kind. But the harm was done already. Floris knew things that are unknown to most boys of ten.

Less attention was paid to him at this period, too, because Agnete's health was precarious. The daily woman bought a turtle-dove in a green cage, which was hung in the passage near the kitchen ; sometimes a turtle-dove took people's diseases from them, she said. That spring Frans noticed that Floris had grown a lot, his forehead looked broader, his thin neck shot up out of his white collar. Uncle Gerbrand had little to say to him, only every day he had to give him a scolding because he was always late for meals ; he listened with lowered eyes, without saying a word. He went to school regularly, behaved well there, was quiet and orderly, and

always knew his lessons. On Sundays he walked sedately behind his uncles to church. No one ever saw him playing.

All the same he did play, but alone, and he could control himself and wait for a time when he wouldn't be disturbed, his half-holidays. Then he would ask his Uncle Frans for a few cents. Once he said to him : ' Other boys are given money, too, and if they aren't given it, they take it, but that's stealing and I don't want to do that.'—' No,' answered Frans, ' that's wrong, I'd rather give you all I have than that you should steal. Uncle Gerbrand would be horrified if he heard you.'

And he went out—if it was raining, no farther than the Forest—and played alone, silently, with something he saw in his imagination. He crept through the wet foliage, as though he were following the trail of an animal, with the hunting-knife in his hand ; he sprang, he fought, he thrust with the knife, he wiped the blood from it on the grass. Then that game was over and he began another, in which the blood of some other animal had to flow. In fine weather he trotted along the soft path to Zandvoort, and hid himself behind a bush on the dunes. He crouched there, on the look-out, with his knife ready, in case a rabbit should come near. If he had to wait too long, his imagination became impatient ; he crept out, he threw his knife, and rushed forward, he saw the blood on the white sand. Or he would

go with the fishing-rod he had made himself and sit on the bank of the Outer Spaarne, cut up a worm for bait, and wait with a glowing face. Here sometimes real blood was shed on the ground. Perhaps he might bring a perch home with its gills slit open. These were his games for a long time, a whole spring and summer, a time that made a deep impression on his mind. He gave no thought to the people at home ; even his mother was only a figure in the bedroom or on her chair.

Once when he was standing looking at the turtle-dove, he saw a gentleman in a tall hat going up the stairs, Jansje said it was the doctor. His mother came down again, but from that day on he never saw her behind the counter, always in her armchair by the window beneath the fuchsia. By day she kept her eyes fixed on the wall above the kitchen, in the evening she stared into the lamp, he rarely heard her say anything. There must have been something queer about her, for anybody who came into the room, one of his uncles, Jansje or the assistant, looked at her, and he had once asked why she had blue lips. When the Fair was over, when it rained long hours on end and the leaves were falling in the Old Gracht, he went back to school and no longer looked at her.

Agnete's voice was never heard. Frans believed that she sat thinking all the time, but Gerbrand shook his head, and said that couldn't be it. ' It is,

I'm sure,' said Frans. 'You'll see, brother, she has something that preys on her mind. Sometimes she knits her brows, and sometimes she looks as though she could see something. If I ask her what she's thinking about, she looks at me with such an odd smile, it frightens me. She can't be reading, she always has the book open at the same page.'

That evening Gerbrand stood up and bent over to look at the Bible that lay open in front of her. 'What are you reading, Agnete?' he asked. With a weary expression she looked up at him and said: 'Oh, I don't read any more, I don't understand what's written there. "For that which I do I allow not, for what I would that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." Berkenrode was like that, and so is my boy, I know it. And I think to myself: what is sin, after all?' He pointed out to her what was written there besides that. 'Your child,' he said, 'is no different from all mankind, flesh wherein sin dwells, but grace shall be given to him through knowledge of the law. He must keep this in front of his eyes, and our example of what is right.' But still she shook her head and she gazed into the lamp. 'That's no answer,' she said, 'there's so much written here about sin, but it's never explained.'

It was a wet autumn with heavy skies, the water pattered incessantly from the gutter into the yard. Agnete went into the shop whenever she heard that they were busy, but she was soon overcome by

fatigue, and then she would go, slowly, with a look in her brother's direction to see if he approved. She sat on her chair by the window and looked at the gloomy yard, at the apple-tree, with drops dripping from its yellow leaves. There was no sound to be heard save the feet in the shop, the sound of peas or beans pouring out of the measure, sometimes the bell. Her brothers had to work, to work all the time, in order to pay, and she wasn't able to. And all the time she had to keep thinking of what was being borne in this house for the fault of another. It would be forgiven, there was no doubt of that, but here it had left nothing but darkness and sorrow in its wake, and even the morrow was dark. What else was there to think, but just : why ? She stared out with her face lifted towards the dim wall. When she heard the cooing of the turtle-dove she moved slightly. When she heard the sound of little feet, the hurried turning of the door-handle, she turned her head. Floris threw down his satchel and his cap and disappeared through the other door.

The room had been dark for a long time when Stien came in to light the lamp. Agnete sighed, she put the Bible in front of her and read what she had read innumerable times : "Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law."

After Christmas she did not appear in the shop any more. The doctor had given her pills, Mrs. Sanné had had a rye loaf baked for her with herbs

in it. Jansje, at her cleaning in the kitchen, saw her sitting motionless the whole afternoon by the window, until the sight nearly made her cry ; she said it was nothing but a decline, just like a plant whose roots are withered.

As soon as the plates had been removed from the table, she sat again with her Bible. Once Frans came in and saw her with her arms crossed over her breast listening to the *Damiaatjes*. She nodded to him, and said : ‘ You’re right, that sound in the evening does the heart good. There was a time when I used to be afraid that my head would burst from it, but now I begin to understand them. Everything passes, even the sins of man.’ His eyes shone, because he was always glad if anything good was said about the chiming of the bells.

And Gerbrand looked up one evening from his accounts because he felt her eyes on him, he saw that there was a smile on her drooping lips. ‘ Are the payments progressing well ? ’ she said. ‘ Will all the debts be paid off by the time Floris is twenty ? ’ — ‘ That’s not in our hands,’ he answered, shrugging his shoulders, ‘ we are doing our best, and if it depends on me, he shall never have to feel ashamed.’

She stood up, she went into the kitchen to send the boy to bed. In the passage she halted in front of the cage, because the dove began to coo so loudly at the light of her candle.

On the following day, returning from church,

Stien found her dead in her chair, with her head on the table, and her hand resting on the Bible. She ran out again quickly, but Floris remained there and, when his uncles came in, there he sat against the wall, with staring, wide-open eyes.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHEN HE WAS THIRTEEN YEARS OLD HE BEGAN TO be careless with his school work. Hitherto he had shown such promise that Werendonk had decided not to bring him up to be a shop-keeper if he was capable of going further and had sent him to the Grammar School. This winter he lost his eagerness to be among the first in his class, he did no more than he was obliged to do. He would sit up in the attic staring in front of him ; or else he pottered about or strolled round the town.

On one of these days he remembered something, and the thoughts it aroused suddenly loomed so large that they filled his whole consciousness. Soon after the death of his mother he had begun to realise that he did wrong ; now this idea returned. He saw clearly in front of his eyes how, at that time, closing the shop door behind him one morning, a terrible feeling had come over him that everyone was a stranger to him. He had looked at the window upstairs, where the bedroom was, and a voice in his mind had said to him : It is your fault ; with all the wrong things you do, your lying and your

stealing ; that's why God has taken her away. And all the houses in the street had looked at him. He had forgotten it, but now it came back with even more force, the feeling that he deceived everyone and that he was alone. And it seemed to him that all the houses in the street knew it.

He looked at them angrily every time he walked past them, for a long time ago he had learnt that there was wrong-doing there too, in every house, more than in his own. Doubtless he had always known it, but he saw now that their house was higher than the others. The house of Tops, the shoe-maker, next door on the right, had only four windows ; that of Minke on the other side, the narrowest in the street, had only two besides a little one that protruded from the pointed roof with its dilapidated tiles. Only that of the baker at the corner of the lane seemed to be higher, but that was owing to the ornamented gable with its sharp point at the top. All the houses were different, and coming from the Gasthuisvest, if you looked up at the roofs, two irregular lines could be seen against the sky—high up, pointed tops, and below that, flat tops. No two houses had a similar gable or were of the same colour ; some had fantastic shapes, others were flat and monotonous ; there were some with dark varnished woodwork and grey plaster ; in the middle of the street stood one that had been unevenly painted, white at the top and blue beneath ;

most of them were of red brick, but even these varied in colour. The Werendonks' house, built of red-brown bricks, the window-sills neatly painted yellow, looked more dignified too, with its broad blue perron, the two wooden seats outside the front-door and the railing that separated it from Minke's door. It looked the cleanest of them all.

He knew all about the different kinds of wickedness that were concealed or suppressed in most of the houses. He had heard a good deal of it from Jansje when she was gossiping with Stien in the kitchen. 'Every house has its cross,' she often said, and sometimes Stien answered that you oughtn't to think the worst of people, but mostly she just listened. Thus he had come to hear about the grown-ups ; he had found out for himself all about the children.

The pastrycook at the corner of the Gracht, Jansje said, was a busybody and a mischief-maker. If there was anything under discussion in the street, he was sure to come along for a chat, and he was ready with advice if you were in his good books. But nearly everyone found that when Wouters had been visiting their shops, they would soon be having difficulties with the Rate-collector or the Inspector of Weights and Measures. But Jansje said he was by no means the worst, for his home was orderly and he brought his children up to be honest and respectable. But Floris knew better about the

children. Perhaps he had not learnt to lie from her, but it was Fientje Wouters whom he had first seen stealing, and she was cunning too, though you would never have guessed it when she looked at you with her limpid blue eyes. It was a long time since he had associated with the Wouters children, but he knew that Steven was the only honest one. And their mother would smile at them, full of pride and trust.

‘You’ll find wrong-doing in every house,’ said Jansje, ‘and there are more things hidden away than you’d believe.’ Mrs. Thijs, on the other corner of Gortestraat, would never have to borrow, for they had one of the busiest druggist’s shops in the district, if it weren’t for Thijs spending so much money in the ale-house. ‘But, it’s her own fault,’ said Stien, and Floris didn’t understand that. As for old Mrs. Sanne, they said that she was always ready to help anyone, but you had to beware of her tongue. It was she who started all the scandals, everyone was very careful with her. At Warner’s, the baker, there was always a row going on in the room behind the shop ; some said it was he who was quarrelsome, others said it was his wife, but his children were always fighting with one another too. Briemen, the pork-butcher opposite, was a violent man, his wife often ran screaming into the street and the children were heard howling ; one of these fine days there’d be an accident there with a knife.

As for their neighbours on either side, Tops was untrustworthy, and made mischief out of everything that came to his ears, and at Minke's not even a child who went in to buy a slate-pencil or a sheet of paper could be sure of getting what he wanted. He imposed on his own wife and children, that was why there was such a gloomy atmosphere there. But the worst disorder was at the tin-smith's, for both Nuyl and his wife were lazy and indolent ; in the muddle they could never find what a customer asked for, and their seven children looked like ragamuffins, untidy and unwashed. So you find some wickedness wherever you look, in one house lying or slandering or intemperance, in another treachery, deceit, quarrelling or violence. The only thing anyone could say about the Werendonks' house was that they were too close about money, but fortunately there was a good reason for that. There was wickedness everywhere. 'What else can you expect?' he had heard Jansje say. 'If the houses were pulled down, if you could see what lay beneath them, you'd find nothing but the iniquities of the forefathers, not only in this street, but everywhere in the town.' In every house there dwelt the ghost of past sins.

But Stien couldn't believe all that. There might be some truth in it, she said, but a lot had been atoned for in every house, too, and when the whole town fell into ruins at the last trump and nothing

was left but the foundations, then you'd hear a lot of sighing, because there was plenty of sorrow as well in all the houses over the evil that people did without wanting to do it. 'You're very ignorant,' said Jansje, going on with her scrubbing, 'as though we can't do right or wrong just as we choose.' Stien sighed and looked up at the ceiling.

He talked about it to Uncle Frans when he went out with him to give him his arm. One morning in the winter Frans had run out in a hurry thinking that the Damiaatjes were ringing for a fire, but it was to warn people of the slipperiness of the streets, for there had been a glazed frost. Just outside the door he slipped himself, fell down the steps and broke his ankle. He had been in bed for a long time and was still rather lame ; the doctor said he ought to go out as much as possible. They walked slowly under the trees by the Spaarne, and Floris asked him if it was true that in all those houses in front of them wrong was being done that people couldn't help doing. 'I don't know about that,' said Frans. 'Do you see that tower there on the Church? Nobody knows how long that's been standing there. All through the day you hear the big bells, in the evening the small ones, and do you know what they say? The big ones tell us to pray that we may be forgiven for everything, and the small ones, when it's dark before we begin the night, tell us that we must have faith in better times to come.'

There were people living in those houses I don't know how many hundreds of years ago, for this is an old town, and no doubt they did wrong sometimes, but what's become of that? It's gone, turned to dust, just like the clothes they wore. At least in those very old houses, built of bricks that aren't smooth any more, and that have an iron rod in the top storey to keep it from toppling over. Those that are straight all the way down and have blue tiles aren't so old ; maybe some of the ill deeds of the forefathers have remained in those.'

He believed what Jansje had said because he had seen from other boys that they told lies or were deceitful for no other reason than that it pleased them to do so. The boys who did wrong at school knew perfectly well that it was wrong, but they preferred to go and play rather than learn their lessons. He had seen it plainly enough with his cousins in Gierstraat, Hendrik and Evert, Diderik Werendonk's eldest sons, his only companions on half-holidays. He took them out for long walks, beyond Bennebroek, and on the way home they had to walk fast so as not to get in late. Once he had held them back and said they needn't hurry, they could make up some story so as not to get a scolding. Hendrik, who was smaller than he was, came close up to him and said : ' Do you think we would tell lies to father ? ' It had frightened him, it was said so fiercely. And he himself knew perfectly well

there was no need to tell lies if he didn't want to, though he sometimes did it without giving it a second thought. He couldn't help it. And punishment was bound to follow on it, and he had rather have that than that it shouldn't be discovered. Although he sometimes succeeded in telling lies so that even Uncle Gerbrand couldn't find it out, still he knew he had done it, and then he had to keep thinking about it in the evening before he went to bed. That made him frightened, and when he was in bed he could see Uncle Gerbrand's eyes looking at him.

Once he was wakened by this thought about lying and other wrong-doing that had been concealed, and again he saw those eyes that looked straight at him, clear as blue glass, but they were not angry. It was as though they said : Don't do it any more, I'll help you. He thought to himself he must make a clean breast of everything he had done and ask Uncle Gerbrand to punish him and help him not to do it again. Then he fell peacefully asleep again. When he got up in the morning he had forgotten about it. But it returned with even more force. It was a May evening and not yet nine o'clock, the parlour was dark, but in the yard there was still twilight. The tray of money was on the table, and beside it a pile of guilders ; Werendonk had been engaged in counting it and had left the room for a moment. He took a guilder ; the pile toppled

over ; he hastily piled it up again. Then he put his hand in his pocket to return the one guilder to the pile, but he heard the step into the shop creaking, he left the guilder lying on a corner of the table. He couldn't walk away, his uncle came into the room. When the lamp was lighted, he saw that his uncle was looking at the guilder that lay so far away from the pile, but he picked it up and said nothing. Floris wanted to tell him what he had done, but the words stuck in his throat. He went out of the room.

When he was undressing, he cried in the dark and he saw the eyes that had looked at him in the lamp-light. He told himself that he was a sneak, but that tomorrow he would confess everything. There would be severe punishment, for, although he had thought better of it on this occasion, he would have to confess that on other occasions he had actually done it, but he would prefer the worst punishment to having it always on his mind.

The next morning Uncle Gerbrand was busy, so he had to wait until the evening. And when it was dusk he was standing in the parlour again by the table where the money-tray stood. Again Weren-donk had left the room for a moment. He waited ; he heard Stien, busy with her pails, singing in the yard. His hand stretched out towards the tray, his fingers picked up a ten-cent piece, but let it drop again ; he told himself he was doing it to prove to himself that he didn't need to take anything if he

didn't want to. His heart thumped. He might just as well take it, no one would notice, but he didn't want to. Then he heard someone coming ; he walked quickly round the room and stood at the other side of the table. Werendonk came in, lighted the lamp and sat down.

' My boy,' he said, looking up suddenly, ' what were you doing with the money just now ? '

He turned red and stuttered. Werendonk waited without looking at him. All at once Floris put his hands before his face, sobbing and crying. When he was calmer, Werendonk said : ' If you've anything on your mind, you'd better tell me ; concealed burdens only grow heavier, and you can depend on my treating you justly.'

And Floris began his confession, at first in a timid, miserable voice, by degrees more frankly, as he had imagined himself doing it, and finally, as though the words came of themselves, he was telling of things that he had almost forgotten, so long was it since he had done them. It was a story of truth concealed, of prevarication and of lies, then of stealing, out of the till, too, that he had done years ago. At first he hadn't felt sorry about it, but now he realised that it was fraud, a serious sin, he couldn't help thinking about it all the time. He stopped again, and in the midst of his sobbing he said he didn't want to be like his father.

Werendonk jumped up, he laid his hand on his

shoulder and said : ' You mustn't speak of that. Your father has appeared before the highest judge, and whatever wrong he may have done from our human point of view he has long since atoned for. It is your duty, as his son, to think of him with respect. But we will pass judgment on what you have done. I'm glad you've confessed your transgressions, that signifies that you understand the difference between right and wrong, and that you have the will to improve. Previously, when you weren't sorry, you hadn't understood that, but now your conscience has awakened. Give me your hand and promise me solemnly that from now on you'll be a good boy. But right is right, and wrong-doing brings punishment. Because of the money you've taken, others have had to go short. You'll go without pocket-money for three months, and when the Fair comes—no money for that.'

He said : ' Thank you, Uncle,' and went to bed. A deep sigh rose from his breast as he listened to the sound of scrubbing in the passage below.

The others noticed that Werendonk asked about him in a friendly tone of voice if he hadn't arrived home, and looked at him with a smile when they were sitting at meals ; also that Floris was more diligent with his homework, and answered cheerfully when he was spoken to. He was always punctual, he waited patiently if Frans wanted him to go out, and walked slowly beside him.

He took more interest in what Frans told him and asked him questions, too, about the peculiarities of the houses or streets, why the Market was called the Sand and how Jacobijnstraat had got its name. They stood such a long time with their faces raised, looking at a gable, that people stared at them. When they met Meier, the blind man, tapping along the doors with his stick, Frans gave him a cent. Then Floris looked into his purse and saw how little he had in it, not more than one ten-cent piece and a few cents. 'Why have you so little money?' he asked him once. 'That's not little,' said Frans; 'it's more than enough, for I never have to buy anything.' Floris thought it odd; in his class at school there were boys who had more than that for pocket-money and Uncle Frans was over thirty years old.

Their walks always led them to the Church in the Vegetable Market and the Belfry Square, and always Frans looked up at the Tower. Once the idea came to Floris, as he looked at him, that perhaps he was not quite right in the head. He could talk of nothing else but the houses in the town and the bells in the Tower; and he obeyed the other uncle just as though he were a child. From that day he watched him, and the tone in which he spoke to him changed.

Since his fall Frans had made a habit of going up to his room as soon as he had finished his dinner, and then Stien would go up and attend to the bandage

round his ankle. One day Floris, going up to the attic, saw the door of the room standing ajar ; he crept on tiptoe, and peeped through the crack. Frans was sitting, leaning back, on the bed, the sun shining across his face, and Stien was on her knees in front of him. She had a little pot in her hand and was rubbing something into his foot. ' After this no more,' said Frans, ' it's much too dear and your father needs the money badly.' ' Briemen gave me fifty cents yesterday when I paid the bill,' she answered. ' I can get another pot with that ; you'll see, it'll do the pain good.'

She stood up ; Floris hurried away. On the attic floor he met her as she was going to her room with the pot in her hand. And later in the afternoon, when he brought his books upstairs, he opened the door of her room cautiously to see what was in the pot. It was a dark ointment, with a sweet smell. There were other things there, too, and the cupboard was open. The next day he went in again and rummaged about. In a box lay a handkerchief with some money tied up in it. It felt heavy. He was curious to know how much it was, but he dared not open it to see. One morning in the holidays, when she was out, he counted the money ; there were sixteen guilders.

Three days before the Fair he met Kolk, a boy from the Third Class, who wore long trousers already. He said he and some other boys were

going to the Fair, and he asked Floris to go with them. 'Or won't your uncle allow you to?' he added with a laugh. In the evening, when the music of the merry-go-rounds could be heard on the Gracht, he took two guilders out of the handkerchief, while Stien was downstairs, singing at her work.

He met Kolk with three others at the Butter Market outside the menagerie tent; there were two girls with them as well, and they went in. From there they went on to other tents, they ate doughnuts and waffles, they drank beer at Koppen's stall, and got rowdier and rowdier. Floris lent some money to someone, and when he had no more left himself, he borrowed from someone else. Then they linked arms and rolled along, accosting and jostling the people, and shouting: 'We won't go home: we won't go home.' When they had spent everything, Kolk said he'd go and ask for some more money, and they all went with him. While they were waiting under a tree by the Forest Bridge, one of the boys said they ought to give Floris a cheer because he wasn't a muff after all. He yelled with them, and he hurried on in front, back to the lights and the music of the merry-go-rounds, his cheeks glowing red. They grew wild, threw doughnuts in each other's faces, and pushed each other through the crowd. Floris heard the Tower clock strike eleven and crept quietly away.

When he got home Werendonk looked up from his

papers, and asked where he had been. 'To the Fair, Uncle,' he said, 'with some of the boys, they treated me.' Werendonk frowned and went on with his work.

The next evening he begged to be allowed to go and walk by the stalls, just to have a look ; Uncle Gerbrand consented. He went every day with the boys until the last Saturday. And when it was over he lay in bed staring through the skylight at the little patch of sky. There was one guilder left in the handkerchief, he would have to take that, too, to pay back what he owed to Kolk. And again he saw the eyes of Uncle Gerbrand looking at him. He had given his word that he would never do it again. It was not entirely his own fault, he thought, if only Kolk hadn't laughed when he asked if he wouldn't be allowed to go to the Fair. He tossed about, he couldn't sleep ; outside some Fair-goers were still singing.

On the following day he waited in his bedroom until Sien went out. It was quiet in the house, and it was getting dark when he heard her close the door. He didn't hear her on the stairs. He sat on where he was for a while, and suddenly he felt hot at the thought of what he had done. It couldn't be helped, he must give Kolk the money, the sooner he did it the better, for the blood was singing in his head. He opened his own door and went cautiously to the door opposite. As he walked into the room,

he was looking over his shoulder. And when he turned round again he saw Stien sitting on her bed with her hat and coat on. On her lap lay the handkerchief, and tears were running down her face. 'Did you do that?' she asked with a sob. He lowered his eyes. It was very still in the little room, and outside there was no sound either. 'Why did you do that?' she asked, and her voice sounded deep and sorrowful. 'My wages, that my father needed to pay his rent. Oh, my lad, don't do such wicked things.' He couldn't see for tears. Suddenly she stood in front of him; she took his head in her arms. She had to press him tightly to her bosom so that his sobs shouldn't be heard. 'Come,' she said at last, and she dipped her handkerchief in the water-jug and bathed his face. 'I've got to catch the tram, and it's getting late. Walk with me as far as the Forest.'

In the street she said nothing, but past the Bridge, when they were alone, she asked: 'Was it for the Fair that you took it? What would your uncle say if I told him?' He clasped her arm with both hands and implored her not to do that, otherwise he'd have to jump into the water, for he wouldn't be able to bear Uncle Gerbrand's face. Stien walked on in silence, holding him by the hand as though he were a small child. At the Deer Park she stood still under a dark tree, she raised his face to hers and said: 'You must promise me that

you'll come to me first, if you get the temptation again, you mustn't steal, I don't want you to do that.' He answered : ' It's no use. I just am wicked.' But she persisted, pressing him, until he gave the promise.

When she had mounted the tram, she waved to him. He walked slowly away ; he looked round again and saw that she was holding her handkerchief to her eyes. That made him feel lonely, all of a sudden, and he dared not mingle with the strollers near the bandstand. He stood where he was under the dark foliage, looking at the figures. He thought of his Uncle Gerbrand and clenched his fists at the thought.

CHAPTER SIX

FOR A FULL YEAR NOW NO ONE HAD HAD TO REPRI-MAND him ; at home or at school ; he was industrious and well-behaved and, although he was known to go about with the most troublesome boys, the teachers praised his conduct. He was quiet, and people thought he looked ill, with his white face, pale lips and heavy eyes ; they thought it was because he was always working at his books. As soon as he came home he went up to his little room and did his homework ; immediately after supper he went on with it. Werendonk had told him that the next year, when he left school, he might go to Amsterdam to study pharmacy.

He didn't hurry over his work and he had no need to make a great effort. The longer it kept him occupied the better, for as soon as he had nothing to do he felt oppressed by loneliness. It was a feeling as though all round and above him there was something that came nearer and nearer and cut him off from other people, and the room seemed to be too small for him. And then the thoughts began about his wickedness. Other boys could laugh

when they told a lie, but he lived in perpetual fear of doing it, and he made great efforts not to. He knew that lying and thieving were born in him. At unexpected moments the desire rose in him to tell a lie, even though there was no need for it, and when he walked through the shop he purposely turned his head away from the till, for the desire to take something was not perhaps so frequent, but much more violent, so that his temples throbbed with it. Often he asked himself why he was not like other boys, who hadn't always to be fighting against themselves. His friends did wrong too, but he knew for certain that he would do much worse things if he didn't control himself. And when he said goodbye every morning and walked quietly to school, no one at home had any idea of the feelings he took with him of being worse than other people, of the loneliness in which he kept them hidden.

One day a suspicion came to him that there was one person who realised it. He was hungry when he got home, he went into the kitchen to ask for a piece of bread. When Jansje had given it to him she knelt down again and went on washing the floor. He looked up at the hail that was falling on the red tiles in spite of the sunshine, and all at once he got the feeling that he was alone and in the midst of silence. He turned round and saw Jansje's sharp, light blue eyes fixed on him. 'What's the matter?' he said. 'What are you looking at me like that

for ? ' She wrung out her flannel without removing her eyes, and she answered slowly : ' Anyone who's startled when you look at him has something on his conscience.'

And once, when he went into the parlour, Jansje was standing in front of Uncle Gerbrand, and she left off speaking. They both looked at him, waiting for him to go away again. He realised that they were talking of him, and he wondered what they could know about him. It was more than a year since he had done anything that he would not have dared to tell his uncle, and if he was asked he wouldn't deny that he had perpetually to strive against his inclinations. His uncle would understand that well enough, for, after all, all men were sinful by nature, and he would no doubt help him to suppress them. He had nothing on his conscience except the fear of doing wrong. But for a long time he had had the feeling that his uncle didn't trust him, but, on the contrary, was always watching him. However much he was praised for his work at school and for his conduct, there was something in his uncle's voice that sounded as though he had not forgotten what Floris had once confessed. And now he began to have an idea that he was suspected of something ; he observed Jansje, and he often caught her looking at him.

What she might be thinking left him indifferent, although it annoyed him to have her staring at him,

but the thought that his uncle was suspecting him oppressed him. Floris knew now what Werendonk had done to make good his father's fraud, the neighbours' children had told him, in their different ways, and Kolk had said : ' Your uncle is a stingy fellow, but there isn't a more honourable man in the town, stinting himself to pay your father's debts.' Then he had understood his strictness, and often he had wanted to tell him that he was grateful, but he dared not, he simply looked at him with respect. He wished he could grow up like that himself. One evening, before he went upstairs, he said suddenly : ' I know what you've done for me, I'm terribly grateful to you.' That was all he could say. His uncle just raised his eyes, adjusted his spectacles and answered : ' I shall be able to judge that from your conduct, and it's God you should be grateful to, not me.' He didn't move, he would have liked to give him his hand, but he went away then. Uncle Gerbrand didn't believe in talk, and he was right, he must show it by his actions. But when he was in bed he wept because he doubted whether he would ever be worthy of complete trust again, for if he didn't keep perpetually on the watch, a lie came out before he knew it, and that was the reason, he knew, why Uncle Gerbrand was always watching him.

That spring he often felt melancholy. There was no one who understood him, no one to help him.

In the Easter holidays he went out mornings and afternoons, because he didn't want to sit in his room with nothing to do. He walked beside the Spaarne, with his eyes on the pavements, as far as the Phoenix garden, and then back the same way to the Peat Market, and once he went into the Forest, but there under the trees, where the wind rustled in the light green foliage, the feeling of loneliness became too overpowering. He avoided the centre of the town too, because he thought that people stared at him in surprise to see him always walking aimlessly and alone, so he preferred to keep to the ramparts on the outskirts of the town. Sometimes he looked up at the trees, at the roofs and the sunny clouds, and he felt eased. But his head would droop again involuntarily, and the thought would return, always the same, why was he driven to do what he didn't want to do?

Once in the Vegetable Market he saw some strangers going into the Church, and he went in too. The verger, who saw him, said that the new organist was practising. Thin, high notes were wailing through the white expanse. He sat down on a stone bench and, lifting his head, fixed his eyes on the summits of the pillars ; he was still sitting thus when he heard from the sound of steps that the visitors were going out again. He was sitting alone, and now there came deep, heavy notes from the organ, and they brought him peace. Now and again

when the notes were high he had to think of all the questions that bothered him, and with the deep notes it seemed to him as though some power possessed him which he could not resist. You must pray, he said to himself, that is the only thing. He folded his hands; he prayed that he might be protected from his thoughts, from lying and stealing, from himself. A long note came from the organ, and suddenly it was silent.

When he opened his eyes and looked round the pillar, he saw in the middle of the Church, high up in the arched roof, two ropes swinging gently. He stretched his head farther round the pillar. In the middle of the floor he saw his Uncle Frans, holding a rope in each hand and looking upwards, his basket stood at his feet beside him, his cap lay on it. His hands were large and white. Floris was frightened, he didn't want anyone at home to know that he had been in the Church, and he went out on tiptoe.

He was amazed. Uncle Frans never went out during the day, certainly not at this time when Gerrit would have to be going out again on his rounds. He made only a slight detour by the Spaarne, and when he went into the shop Uncle Frans was standing behind the counter in his grey jacket. They looked at each other. 'Have you been out?' fell from Floris's lips. Frans bent down to pick something up and answered carelessly :

‘Yes, just for a moment.’ Then Floris realised that he, too, simple though he was, had something to hide.

He lay awake that night until he heard from the footsteps on the stairs that Uncle Gerbrand had gone to bed, and perpetually he had a vision of the queer figure in the middle of the Church, with the two ropes in his white hands. Even when he was dozing off he could still see the ropes swinging in the high arches.

The following morning he had found an old book in a chest in the attic and was sitting on the floor under the skylight reading. He heard someone sweeping the stairs and, looking up, he saw across the threshold on a level with the floor Jansje’s black cap, and her pale eyes looking at him. He was startled and stood up. Now he knew for certain that she was spying on him. Why? He was close to the door of Stien’s room, perhaps she was watching to see if he went in. That same day he got another fright. He was standing alone in the shop, ready to go out, deliberating where he should go. He wanted to ask Kolk to go with him to Overveen, but he had no money in his pocket, and was wondering whether he could ask Uncle Gerbrand for some. In the old days, if he had found no one in the shop, he would have just slipped behind the counter, but now he didn’t even look in the direction of the till. He thought he was a coward to be so

timid, and he turned round. He started back ; there in front of the till stood Uncle Frans, his arms crossed, looking at him. 'What are you afraid of?' he asked. He flushed, and, without answering, went out of the door, and he noticed that Uncle Frans followed him with his eyes.

He was angry with himself for being so nervous ; after all, there was no need for it, he had been intending no harm, but he couldn't help it, the figure in the grey jacket had appeared so suddenly, like a ghost. It was queer, he still felt a cold shiver at the thought. And he forgot that he would rather not go out with Kolk with no money in his pocket ; he walked quickly to his home in the Raamvest.

As soon as the door was opened, Kolk called out from the sitting-room that he must come in. Floris was confused as he stood in the room, with its carpeted floor and plush-covered chairs, face to face with Kolk's two sisters, who smiled at him and said he needn't call them "Miss." Jan Blusser was there, too, who always made fun of him in the playground before they went to school, a tall boy with dark, narrow eyes, and bony hands. He said : 'Berkenrode is the best boy in the whole town, and that's because he has such good uncles.' The girls laughed.

The three of them went out, and before they had reached the Canal Gate Blusser had said that

Floris was a stupid never to have any money. 'The grown-ups boss us too much,' he said, 'they're only holding back the money that'll be ours later on. Last week I took three silver spoons out of the drawer and sold them at Swarts. That's the way to manage things ; after all, they can't do anything to me.' Floris asked if he didn't think that was stealing. 'No,' said Kolk, 'that's not the same ; taking things from your own home is taking them from yourself. You don't mind taking a piece of cake out of the cupboard, and that surely isn't theft.' And Blusser said : 'You may be a clever fellow, but you haven't much sense. They call theft a crime and you go to prison for it, but what actually is crime ? How can you say that taking spoons from your parents is theft and yet call the conquering of a whole country, like Napoleon did, a heroic action ? It's a question of where you draw the line, and I believe in plenty of scope.' When Floris answered that it was theft all the same, however you looked at it, and, after all, you could read in the Bible that all men were thieves and murderers, they began to laugh. 'If you believe that, then you must be one too,' said Kolk. 'Yes,' he answered, 'I am, but that's no reason why I shouldn't do my best not to be.' The two others weren't listening any more, they were ogling girls. There was a lot more talk afterwards, and Floris realised that he couldn't express himself clearly, but he stuck seriously to

his opinion. He couldn't bear Blusser's mocking smile.

That afternoon they arranged to go to Amsterdam in the holidays to see the sort of fun people had there, then they wouldn't be so green the following year. Floris regretted it immediately, because he knew he wouldn't be able to go with them without any money.

During the days that followed his mind was very active, carrying on imaginary conversations with Blusser, who was wrong, but who smiled as though he knew best. "Thieves and murderers, and imposters, every one of us," it would be, and Blusser would say: "All right, the grown-ups as well as us." At night it kept him awake. He would have liked to think of other things, of that afternoon in the Church, but he looked into the darkness again. And sometimes it was Blusser with his smile he saw, sometimes Jansje's suspicious eyes spying at him, or again the simple face of Uncle Frans. He lay so long with his eyes open that the darkness grew grey. It was just the same the next night, and the nearer the holidays drew, the longer he lay sleepless. Once he pressed his face passionately into the pillows, and asked: What's the matter, what's wrong with me? I don't want to think about it. And suddenly a light dawned on him, he must ask Stien to give him some money, otherwise he would have no peace.

She gave it to him willingly, with a wink to indicate that she wouldn't mention it. Twice they went to Amsterdam ; Kolk and Blusser were excited, but he felt oppressed. They had quarter-guilders where he had only cents. The second time, they lost sight of each other in the dense crowd on the Y, where fireworks were being let off. Except for a gleam of the Bengal fire in the air, or sometimes the lurid light of the rockets high up above, he could see nothing of them. He wanted to go away, but he thought that it was better here after all than in his room. He waited to see if there would be any more fun. The crowd of jostling boys carried him with them until he was standing on a bridge ; there lay the dark water with its many lights, with figures in boats, shouting and singing. He wanted to go into the town, but he didn't know the way, and he had only three cents left. The others were probably having a good time somewhere. All round him, on the bridge and in the seething dark crowd along the quayside, people were rollicking and making merry, stretched out in broad lines, arms linked ; everyone was happy, and he stood alone with a feeling of being forsaken.

When a plan was made to go again, he hesitated, and refused, although the idea attracted him, for they told him about a *café-chantant*—the fun they had had there over a couple of drunken men ; there were rows of *café-chantants*, and when the doors were

wide open you could see the artists in a circle on the stage. But he said he wouldn't go with them. Stien had told him she couldn't give him anything more this month, perhaps a few quarters, no more. He was lying awake, before he realised it the thoughts were coming into his mind. Only a little could be taken from the till without its being noticed when the money was counted in the evening, but the box that stood in the cupboard, a rixdollar and a guilder would never be missed from that. If there was a lot in it, he might even take two guilders. What time? And supposing it was locked? He stared into the dark; Jansje's eyes were fixed on him. He had promised, if the temptation came, to ask Stien first, but, after all, he knew she hadn't any to give him. If his uncles died he would inherit from them, but he would have to share with the children of Uncle Diderik. But his uncles were strong and tough, they might live another ten years yet. The dawn was breaking when his eyes closed from sheer fatigue.

The following morning, after breakfast, he was looking for an exercise book, and he asked Uncle Frans whether it might not have been put in the cupboard. He opened the cupboard, on the shelf right in front of him he saw the box, with the key in the lock.

He was lying awake again, without thinking, the darkness grew grey before his eyes, and there was

a buzzing in his ears. He seemed to be waiting for something. He seemed to be stretching out his hand, he could see his hand too, a vague shape in the darkness. And he had the feeling that someone was looking at it, but he knew it was his imagination. The sky outside the skylight seemed to be growing less dark.

He could only have just dropped off to sleep when he was wide awake again, for the sky was still dark. Suddenly he felt so restless that he wanted to go out, it was oppressive in the little room, oppressive in the whole house, as though something was impelling him. He dressed himself quickly and, with his shoes in one hand, groping with the other, he went down the stairs, cautiously, step by step, so that the stairs shouldn't creak. In the parlour downstairs he noticed that it was lighter than he had expected, the dawn was glimmering through the blind, he could see the branches and leaves of the plant that stood in front of it. He fetched his cap from the passage and shut the door again cautiously. His hand groped over the cupboard, he didn't look, but he felt himself opening something. He knew it was not himself doing it. The box was hard and cold, the key turned smoothly. He felt a chill. Thieves and murderers, whispered a voice.

The door of the cupboard was closed. I can't stay in this house any more, he thought, it's getting too much for me. With hands outstretched, to feel

his way, he walked from the cupboard to the glass door, he felt he was being pursued, and the sweat stood on his brow. He slipped on the step, he looked back to see who was there, and he ran through the shop. He tugged at the bolt. When he stood outside he trembled as he closed the door noiselessly. He looked the house up and down, the windows were dark, but they hid something. Suddenly he sobbed and began to run. At the corner he turned round and through his tears he said : ' I don't want to do it, but in that house it's too much for me.' Then he ran faster. He heard the clock in the Tower, and he ran faster still. He didn't stop until he reached the other side of the railway and stood beneath the trees of the Rampart ; he looked back at the Jansweg, deserted as far as the other side of the bridge in the dim morning light ; he couldn't go back there again, for beyond that was the terrifying house. The tears sprang into his eyes again, he began to run once more, looking back from time to time to see if he was being followed. On his right stood three black-and-white cows bent over the dark ditch ; they turned round and began to run away ; he could still hear them lowing when he had passed the churchyard.

The sky was bright over the canal where he had to halt ; he sat down on the edge of a field of rape-seed. As he thought over what he had done, the tears streamed down his face. It was not his fault,

answered that he came from Haarlem, was a nephew of the Werendonks, and that was all they could get out of him in answer to their questions. Then a woman came in whom he was told to call "Aunt," followed by another tall woman leading a child by the hand. 'Well,' said his uncle, when he had grasped that Floris had run away from home, 'you can stay here for tonight, but then you'll have to go back, for I can't keep you here, nothing from brother Gerbrand's is any good. I'll give you money for the journey.' The woman led him away to brush the dirt from his shoes and to wash his hands ; she didn't speak and left him alone. After that he was given some bread-and-butter at a table in the coffee-room, while his uncle sat opposite him, quietly smoking his pipe and staring at him. When the plate was empty, he said : ' Well, so you're the son of that fellow Berkenrode. And why have you run away ? '

Floris sat without answering, his eyes lowered. At last he ventured to ask what time there was a train the next day.

When he had stretched out his stiff legs in bed, he thought of the house in Little Houtstraat, the echoing rooms and passages, the grey walls that filled him with fear.

In the early morning he went away ; his uncle stood at the door looking after him. At the corner he turned round, but he didn't wave his hand. In

the train he sat staring in front of him, his teeth clenched, his fists balled. Why he had run away was nobody's business, he would never speak about it and he would struggle with himself, alone, without help.

The shop was full of customers when he walked in with a pale but smiling face. The first to ask him anything was Stien, who came out of the kitchen in a state of agitation. He answered casually that he had been to pay a visit to his uncle in Hoorn, and he said the same thing to Uncle Gerbrand at dinner. Werendonk was silent, and Uncle Frans, too, asked him no questions. When they got up from table, Werendonk said : ' My boy, you're telling lies again, for you were seen leaving the house as though you were running away. And if you won't confess, all I have to say is : don't do it again.' Floris sat with bowed head.

He stayed in his little room under the skylight with the feeling that he was a prisoner. He looked at the wainscoting, pasted over with grey paper, at the old bedstead where he would have to lie again, the boards of the floor, neatly scrubbed. The summer sky gleamed through the square window. The holidays would last fully another three weeks, and he would have to sit here, for when the Fair began tomorrow, he wouldn't dare to go out for fear of meeting his friends.

He sat alone and from boredom he read his school-

books. Uncle Gerbrand didn't speak to him. Uncle Frans sometimes looked at him questioningly but he said nothing. Only after supper did he go out and then, so as not to meet any of the boys, he went to the quietest spots, on the other side of the Spaarne and on the outskirts of the town. He found it peaceful there, too, in the narrow streets, where there were but few people, and where, behind windows, the gleam of the flames under the coffee-pots could be seen. The evening air was fresh at this time, and there was still a pale light in the sky. Then he heard the Damiaatjes in the distance. For something to do he counted the number of times they rang, he listened to the difference in the bells, some loud and firm, some soft, dying.

One evening when he was walking thus, counting the chimes, passing through Begijnesteeg, he saw Jansje outside the door of her home, the smallest house in the lane. 'Not gone to the Fair?' she asked. And she took his hand and led him in to have a cup of coffee; the pot stood over the burner, whence little patches of light shone into the darkness of the room. She sat opposite him, but all he could see was some straggly white hair under her cap. No one was passing along the lane, and they were silent. But then Jansje asked after his uncle in Hoorn, if he had grown old. 'He never did any good,' she said in a gentle voice. Floris found it difficult to answer, but she grasped that he had not had a good reception.

‘I could have told you that in advance,’ she said, ‘that man has no heart.’

He was speaking, he could barely hear his own voice. The Damiaatjes ceased, the big clock struck the half-hour. He had told her everything he did on that night, although he had not wanted to ; his head fell on his arm across the table. Then he felt her hand on his shoulder and he heard : ‘Poor lad,’ on a note that sounded like a sob. She stood thus beside him for a long time in the dark. ‘You can always come to me,’ she said at last, ‘if you feel you want to unburden yourself. And don’t forget, no one need do wrong if he doesn’t want to. As long as you don’t want to, God will help you. And you can always rely on your Uncle Gerbrand, he is an upright man.’

At the door she repeated : ‘You can always come to me, if you’ve too much on your mind, I’ll keep it to myself ; after all, I’m old enough to be your grandmother.’ And he said : ‘Thank you, Jansje.’

He didn’t meet his friends again until the school term began. He visited Kolk and they laughed at Blusser’s saucy jokes. One evening Uncle Frans looked up in amazement because he had not said “amen” at the end of grace. And once, when he was standing talking to Stien on the stairs, he said : ‘Damned nonsense, there is no God, that’s nothing but lies for stupid people.’ He grew noisy about the

house, he could be heard singing up in his room when he was doing his homework. Stien didn't repeat what he had said, nor did Jansje tell what she knew about him, and Werendonk thought that he was happy, as young people should be.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WERENDONK NOTICED THAT HE WAS FALLING INTO thought again instead of doing his accounts ; he was already weeks behind with them, for perpetually he was obliged to put down his pen and wonder what decision to come to about the boy. He turned the wick lower, because the light, shining on the papers spread out over the table, was too bright for him. He picked up the cash-book, followed the amounts with his finger, and estimated, as he had done so many times before, how long it would be before everything was paid off. This period coincided more or less with the number of years that Floris would require for his studies. He had always hoped, too, that when the boy had to begin earning his living, he would be freed from the disgrace attached to his name. It had remained a disgrace, although the Bankruptcy Acts had changed that too, and it would go on being so regarded by all those who had claims. But in five or six years' time no blot would remain on Floris's name.

The window was pushed right up ; it was raining

steadily and the water was pouring from the gutter. He stared out at the yard, where the lamplight shone on the wet leaves of the apple-tree. He had promised that tomorrow he would give his decision as to whether Floris was to be allowed to live in Amsterdam. He meditated what he would have said if his sister had asked his advice. 'No,' it would have been, 'he is too young to live in the big town without supervision ; no, he needs supervision more than most boys.' He seldom had to scold him, but that was because the boy stood in awe of him, but what would become of him as soon as he knew that nobody had an eye on him ? He was a weakling, only kept in control by supervision ; nearly every day he caught him out in small lies, prevarication or deception, and Floris was well aware that he saw through him. He could not send a boy, whom fear alone kept from doing worse, without support into the midst of temptation. When Jansje had heard that he was to go and live in Amsterdam in September, she had warned Werendonk that that would be driving him to perdition. And none but he would bear the responsibility.

But the boy was insistent, begging and imploring to be allowed to go ; he didn't want to be made fun of by his school-fellows ; after all, they hadn't to remain subject to their parents' supervision. It was true one day he would have to let him stand alone

and pray that he might be protected. And Mrs. van Berchem had already been to see him to talk it over. Werendonk would have preferred her not to interfere, but it was nothing but friendliness because she had heard about it at the Kolks', and had promised Floris to put in a good word for him. She herself had a son, a student, who lived away from home, and she laughed at the idea of being afraid of the temptations in the city. But the smallest temptation, which one boy wouldn't even consider, for another might be a great danger, just as damp wood does not burn, but a bundle of straw bursts into flame from a single spark.

He forgot his work, staring past the lamplight into the darkness, thinking of the time when misfortune had begun for his sister and her child. He had done his duty, brought up the boy well, and together with his brothers had worked to wipe the stain from his name. Now the time was approaching to send him into the world. It was no use fighting against that. He felt hot, and rising from his seat, went and stood so close to the window that the raindrops splashed on to his hands. Then he noticed how quiet it was, everyone was asleep. He sighed and thought : How quiet it will be when the boy is not at home. The clock in the Tower was striking one o'clock when he shut the window. He looked again at the cash-book where the debts were listed,

and he thought of the expense he would have to face.

In September the day came for Floris to go. Werendonk went to the station with him ; Jansje and Stien watched him through the window as he turned out of the street with his bag.

At first he came home regularly on Saturdays. Then for two successive weeks he stayed away, and Werendonk went to Amsterdam to see what the reason for this could be. He did not find him at home, but he saw that his room was untidy, with empty bottles and a jug on the table, an ash-tray, full, as though he had had a lot of visitors. Floris had very little pocket-money, not enough to offer his friends wine. Werendonk thought he must have been running up an account ; he realised that students, at the outset of their careers, like to be gay, and the next time Floris came home he gave him a box of cigars and a little money, with the admonition not to get into debt. 'It's good to enjoy yourself,' he said, 'you'll only be eighteen once, but don't forget your duty.'

The Christmas vacation was a cheerful time for Werendonk. It did him good to look at Floris, to see how his shoulders were broadening, to listen to him talking of learned matters.

With the New Year, troubles came to the house. Werendonk had to stay in bed for several weeks and leave everything to his brother. And it seemed as

though Frans had become more restless since the boy left home. He had fallen into his old habit of going out for a stroll every evening before nine o'clock, and now that he couldn't do this, he became irritable, he was disagreeable with the customers and served them carelessly. Werendonk, who got up sooner than he should have done, remained poorly. He had to sit up late to clear up the muddle the cash in the till had got into, and he didn't get to bed until after three in the morning.

The season was bitterly cold, the ice-flowers were thick on the window-panes and, in spite of the mittens he wore, he could hardly hold the pen in his hand. For several nights past he had heard a crackling sound, he thought that the wood was being affected by the sudden cold. One evening some great flakes of paint fell from a beam in the ceiling on to the table. After that he noticed that the wall-paper was peeling off. Werendonk began to fear that it was growing serious, for in the bedroom, too, and in Floris's attic room, both of them also facing on to the yard, flakes of paint were found, and in the attic, moreover, there was a crack in the wainscoting. But the creaking and crackling was heard by none save Werendonk as he sat alone at the table in the evening and all was quiet in the house. Never, so long as he could remember, had it been necessary to do any structural repairs, for, although the house was probably a couple of hundred

years old, the woodwork and masonry were solid, and it had been kept in good order and regularly repainted.

One evening, when he was sitting up late into the night again, it seemed to him as though upstairs, in the room where Frans slept, he could hear something falling, a dull sound. Whereupon the wooden frame of the window began to crack. He looked up and saw that the beam above it was moving, a piece of the brown wood became visible and dust fell on to the plant. Suddenly he heard a loud report ; he stood by the table bewildered, the lamp was slowly swaying. There was a bustle up above ; Frans came hurrying down the stairs, followed by Stien. They saw Werendonk, who pointed to a crack in the wall above the window. Then they lighted a candle and went upstairs to investigate. In Frans's room there was a fissure in the wall under the window, and a wider one above it. In the attic, where the floor was covered with plaster-dust, the fissure was a good two hands in width, the frame of the skylight was loose and hanging down into the room. The stars were shining brightly in the sky. They looked at one another without uttering a word, and Frans, standing in his nightshirt holding the candle-stick, was shivering with cold. Smoke from the baker's oven was floating into the room. Early next morning, when the builder came, it seemed that the damage was serious, for on one side of the fissure

the gable was tilting forward, and had to be propped up there and then, and the rafters had given way. Werendonk was aghast when he was told the estimated cost. The builder said : ' It's an old house, even the best work gives way eventually ; it's nothing to do with the cold weather, it's old age.'

He had no money available, because everything was devoted to paying off the big debt. And when he was calculating how the money could be found, he decided that economies would have to be made in Floris's expenses, and that he would have to give up living in Amsterdam. He talked it over with his brother ; they decided to share a bedroom, and to give Floris the biggest room where Agnete used to sleep.

Floris missed coming home for three Saturdays following. He wrote that he was busy with his studies. By the time he came, the scaffolding had been removed. In the room destined for him there was a new carpet and a cupboard for his books. He made no response when he heard the news. Later on, looking out of the kitchen window at the masonry, he said to Stien : ' To think that I had to come home for that. It ought to fall down altogether ; it's not worth preserving.' In the evening Werendonk had explained to him again that they would have to live very economically now, but if all went well, perhaps the following year Floris would

be able to live in Amsterdam again. 'But we are clay,' he said, 'and God is the potter.'—'Yes, Uncle,' was the answer, but in such a strange tone that Frans frowned.

It was not until April that he brought his books and his clothes home to the new room; even then he still stayed away for several days. At last he arrived on the last train to sleep at home again. He did this every day. In the morning he wasn't seen at all until just before dinner; he hurried out of the shop with his books under his arm. Once, when he got home after midnight, Werendonk asked why he didn't come home sooner and do his work in his own room as he was supposed to do. In reply he made some excuse in an indifferent tone, as much as to say that was nobody's business. One Sunday his uncle had a talk with him, in a friendly way without reprimanding him, saying that, if his uncles did their duty by him, it was to be expected of him that he, too, should do his. He listened, his eyes fixed on the floor, and answered: 'Yes.' But on the following days again he did not come in until after twelve. And when next Werendonk spoke to him, he noticed that Floris had been drinking.

Werendonk sat up late, pacing restlessly up and down in the parlour, wondering what he could do to keep the boy on the right path. He didn't trust him and he feared that he was up to no good; he

wondered what he could do to find out what he did with his time there in the town. They were sorrowful days for him, tortured by the terrible thoughts of the father's sins which were appearing again in the son. And he reproached himself that, absorbed by the task of freeing him from disgrace, he had failed in his duty of bringing the boy up to be a good, god-fearing man. He went to see his brother Diderik to talk it over, and the advice he got there was to keep Floris at home and put him into the shop, for after all he belonged to the shop-keeping class. But it was no use doing that, because his education had made him unsuited to it. One day at dinner, when they were sitting opposite each other, he talked of it to Frans, merely because his thoughts gave him no rest. At first Frans was silent for a while, then he shook his head and said : ' No, there's nothing we can do about it, there is more wickedness in him than we realise. Pray that it may pass, that's the only thing.' And once when he was sitting in his bedroom with his head in his hands, Jansje came in and, looking at him, she said : ' You've a heavy load of sorrow, but don't forget that the boy has more need of forgiveness than most, and more support and more devotion, for, with all the sacrifices you have made for him, you haven't been able to replace father and mother. You have always thought a lot about sinfulness. I remember that from the time when your father was alive, but you've been so taken up

with that thought that you haven't noticed sin itself. That was in your house before the child ever came here ; perhaps you've noticed that he told lies and deceived you, and have beaten him for it, but you've never known what the child himself has had to fight against. He must be helped, day in day out, that's the only way to keep him straight. He's very dear to you, isn't he ? ' He sighed : ' If only I knew the way.'

He was annoyed to find the neighbours were beginning to talk about it. First it was Mrs. Sanne who, while other customers were standing in the shop, asked after Floris—was he so busy that he couldn't get home before the night train ? Another time, Wouters, walking down the street with him on his Saturday round, said it was easy to see how worried he was, but it was his own fault, because he had tried to bring up the boy above his station. And from Jansje's indignation against the neighbours, he realised that more than that was being said.

Floris stayed away for three nights. He came in late with a pale face and his clothes untidy. Werendonk spoke to him at once, but he went upstairs without answering. On the following morning, as soon as he heard that he was getting up, Werendonk went up to his bedroom, and, while Floris was dressing, he said to him shortly that his studies would have to come to an end if he couldn't behave himself

properly. The answer he received was unexpected and strange. 'Yes,' said Floris, 'they'll certainly come to an end soon. For in this house I get no peace.' He asked him several times what he meant by this, but Floris gave no reply. Half an hour later he saw him hurrying out with a bundle of books under his arm.

One afternoon a carriage stopped at the door and Kolk's mother asked to speak to him. 'Werendonk,' she said, as soon as she was seated, 'what I have to say isn't pleasant.' She had come to advise him to keep a sharper eye on his nephew, for she had heard from her son that of all the young men he led the wildest life, and he had a bad influence on the others and borrowed money from them, more than Werendonk probably knew of. He listened, looking her straight in the face. In the yard Stien was busy scrubbing her buckets, the noise distracted him, and he wanted to understand clearly. Hesitatingly, Mrs. Kolk said that his friends suspected him of dishonesty, but she only mentioned it because she thought Werendonk ought to know what the young people were saying. She had come to tell him this because everyone knew how respected Werendonk was in the town. He thanked her, saying: 'Oh well, madam, young people have to sow their wild oats.' He accompanied her to her carriage and bowed, while the neighbours peeped through their windows. Then he went quietly back behind the

counter. Only Frans noticed that there was a harder expression on his face.

At supper-time the brothers did not speak. The elder was thinking of that journey to Spa, his mind's eye dwelt perpetually on the nightshirt with the red stains on it. Frans was thinking of the man who rang the Damiaatjes and who had a stiff arm and couldn't hold the rope taut ; he noticed this every evening because one of the bells was slightly out of time. He went out before nine o'clock, and Gerbrand didn't even observe it. When he returned two hours later, his brother was sitting at the table, without his account books, staring in front of him.

Floris stayed away for a week. His face was thin, there were dark circles round his eyes. Werendonk said he would overlook it this time, but that he was seriously thinking of paying no more fees for him after September.

For several days after this Frans was frequently surprised when he looked at Stien or Jansje to see that they appeared to have been crying, their eyes looked so moist. Apparently Warner's wife had noticed this also, for one day when he was serving her she said : ' Is something the matter with Stien's father that she is looking so miserable ? The whole house seems to be affected. It's so quiet.' Then he, too, observed how quiet it was. He thought to himself it was often like that on sunny afternoons in

the early summer, when people felt heavy and not a sound was to be heard in the whole street. His brother had gone out with the assistant to see what the barge had brought in ; there was no one at home but his nephew, who was sitting up in his room at his studies.

On the following days, too, Frans often noticed how quiet it was ; the warm weather had begun early, the sun was bright in the sky all day long, and in the late afternoon it shone through the top panes of the shop-window. Floris, who didn't go into town now because he had to work hard for his examination, sat up in his room, and nothing was heard of him.

In July he had to go up to Amsterdam, and when he came back in the evening he said that he had failed in his examination.

The following day, when Werendonk had to go out to make his payments, Frans was called out of the shop. His brother stood there, pale, as though something serious had occurred. But he spoke calmly, 'Frans,' he said, 'I don't make mistakes about money. I know exactly what I put in my pocket-book and, besides, look, I had jotted down the numbers of the notes.' He had laid his pocket-book down on the table while he went upstairs to put on his coat, and when he came back he noticed that it had been moved. The sixty-guilder note had gone. Gerbrand had looked in the money-box

and had searched in the till to make quite sure, but it was not to be found. 'Who has been into the parlour?' he asked. Frans thought that he had noticed Stien passing by the glass door, but he couldn't be certain. His brother sent him back to the shop, where customers were waiting, and called Stien. She came down with her duster in her hand. Even before Werendonk spoke, she saw that he was upset, and before she realised what was wrong, the blood had rushed to her face. He asked if she had been into the parlour just now, and she merely shook her head. 'Very well,' he said, 'then never mind.' When she still waited and asked him what he wanted, he answered that she must hunt for the note he had lost here, because he had to go out; he couldn't keep the people waiting. An hour later, while she was laying the table, she said she had found nothing. He noticed that her eyes were wet. She had to call Floris down to dinner, and she came back to say that he wasn't in his room. No one had seen him go out.

That evening, towards twelve o'clock, when Werendonk was sitting bent over his books deep in thought, the door was softly opened, and Stien, in her dressing-gown, with bare feet, came and stood in front of him. 'Oh, Werendonk,' she said almost in a whisper, 'I am so worried about Floris sometimes that I can't sleep.'

Suddenly she was silent and held her hand over

her eyes as though to control herself. He said quietly that there was no reason for anxiety, for the boy had been behaving himself well lately, and it might happen to anyone to be unsuccessful in an examination. No more was said. She went away, closing the door softly again.

Before they went to Church the next day Frans decided to have a good look in the parlour for the money, but Gerbrand said that Sunday must not be profaned. Floris stayed away again that night.

At breakfast the following morning, Gerbrand asked his brother what he thought of the idea of giving the number of the note to the police. Frans said he didn't know what to think. Stien, who was in the room, hesitated before she went out. And when Werendonk went into the passage to fetch his cap, she came up to him and asked if he had meant what he said. 'Yes,' he answered, 'otherwise I should be kept in suspense too long, and I couldn't bear that.'—'Then don't trouble to go,' she said suddenly. 'It was I did it.' He hung up his cap on the hat-stand; he looked through the window into the yard. Then he said: 'I heard what you said; but that can't be true.'

'But it is,' she repeated. 'I took it, go and tell the police, if you like.'

'It can't be true, I tell you. If you're losing your reason, go home and think it over. Today week,

you can come back ; or sooner, if you've come to your senses. But go at once.'

The next evening, when Floris came home and was about to go upstairs, Werendonk said : ' Wait a moment, I've a sad story to tell you. Stien has confessed to taking money, and I have sent her home. She has been with us for more than twenty years, since before you were born. It must be a shock to you too.'

' Yes,' answered Floris, but he could say no more. When he was alone, Werendonk stood up and paced up and down the room, his arms folded.

The brother in Gierstraat had heard why Stien had been sent away. He said he knew what he should have done if their sister's child had been his responsibility. The neighbours heard of it. Floris sat all day long in his bedroom, he made no sound there, and at meal-times he did not speak. One evening, under the lamp-post in the Kampervest, he met his cousin Hendrik, who came up to him and slapped his face ; he did not retaliate. One day in the Drive, Kolk came up to him and called him a blackguard and a coward, who would do better to hang himself ; he made no answer. He didn't want to go out, but he felt oppressed in the house, with Jansje refusing to look at him, the pale face of one uncle who eyed him reproachfully, the set eyes of the other, staring out in front of him.

A week after Stien had gone away, turning to his brother at supper-time, Werendonk said : ' Tomorrow, I must come to a decision about Stien. If she can't clear things up, then the police will have to do it. It's a pity with such a faithful servant, but there's nothing else to be done.'

Floris stood up ; he clutched the back of his chair and said in a shaking voice : ' Well then, if I must say it, it was I did it. But it's the way you've brought me up. Always in this dark house, that boring old shop, and never any more pocket-money than a child. And why ? Because my father was a thief, am I to suffer for it ? I was taken into this house as though it were a favour, but I've never heard of anything but sin and duty and good behaviour, and no one has cared an atom about my needs. You've embittered my whole life, that's what you've done, in this gruesome house. Send me to prison ! What matter ? It'll come to that in the end. And if stealing isn't enough, then perhaps I'll do something else.' He seized his chair in both hands and swung it round to hit Werendonk, but Frans had jumped up and received the blow on his arm. Werendonk rose from his seat ; he stood up tall in front of Floris, who recoiled and dropped the chair. He said quietly : ' Go upstairs and think over your words.'

The brothers sat down at the table again, their

arms crossed ; they did not speak and stared into the lamp. After a little while, Jansje came in to clear away the plates. When she had finished, she said softly : ' He is to be pitied, don't forget that.'

CHAPTER EIGHT

IT WAS A LONG WINTER, WITH GREY DAYS, RAIN AND mists, and the house seemed to be darker than ever, especially the parlour with the blind half down, the passage along by the yard, the staircase with the treads painted black in the middle. It was quiet too, each one alone with his own thoughts. Weren-donk, who had been laid up again in September, coughed first thing in the morning ; he mounted the stairs slowly and with difficulty because of the pain in his leg. When he looked round for his spectacles, reluctant to rise, and Floris jumped up to look for them, he would say : ‘ That’s old age, my boy, it brings afflictions with it. We are but dust, to dust we must return.’ But he didn’t like people to mention his ailments, or give him advice as to what he should or should not do ; he would wave them off as much as to say it merely bored him. In the shop he served the customers in silence, more slowly than he used to, folding the tops of the bags carefully, and sometimes he would look up with a surprised expression at an ordinary question, as though he hadn’t understood. His old

acquaintances realised that he was absorbed in thought ; they looked at him patiently while he served them, and when they went out they gave him a friendly nod. The younger brother, who had always been the quiet one behind the counter, was now the more talkative ; he seemed to be less retiring, at any rate with the neighbours and old customers. Someone remarked that he seemed to have a smile on his face even when he was silent. But in the house, at meals or when he was waiting to hear what his brother had to say to him, he was as silent as ever and sometimes so absent-minded that he would reply " yes " with a smile when the answer should have been " no ". Or he would unexpectedly say something that astonished Weren-donk. ' We ought to have that wall at the back of the house whitewashed, brother, it would look more cheerful.' If, in an hour's time, his eldest brother referred to it, he would have forgotten it as completely as though he had never mentioned it. ' Oh,' he would say, raising his eyebrows, ' have it whitewashed ? ' And he would stare in front of him as though he were thinking of something else. Later in the winter, he would go out into the yard sometimes to look at the sky. ' With all this fog,' he said to Jansje, ' let's hope we don't get a frost.' And once he came home in the morning with a flushed face, while it was still dark and Stien was sweeping the floor by candle-light. ' There was a

frost,' he said, 'the trees were still white, but it was beginning to thaw. You heard, didn't you? The bells were ringing for half an hour, and it was I who rang them. It's my duty to warn people, with this foot of mine that I broke through its being so slippery.'

It was a red-letter day in the house ; the customers heard of it, and the neighbours were talking about how Frans had rung the Damiaatjes because of the slippery streets. He bustled about, rubbing his hands, and his eyes shone. At dinner his brother asked him if he had arranged it with old Simon, and what the verger had said. And Jansje, who was standing near, began to talk of old Simon's infirmities ; his arms were so painful that he had to put his elbows into the loops of the ropes when he was ringing the bells. That day there was a lot more talk than usual ; Floris alone did not open his lips. But the day after it was as quiet as ever again in the house.

Floris attracted no attention. After breakfast he would ask his Uncle Gerbrand what there was for him to do, a message in the town or a job in the shed. Then he would go off quietly, and no one ever saw when he returned. If he was sitting in his bedroom no sound betrayed it. It was only in the evenings that he would speak, when Werendonk asked him about the text the domine had been expounding to him. This domine held views that Werendonk

didn't agree with, because he had been taught otherwise, but he thought it was better to entrust the boy's guidance to a young minister, who would understand young people better. As far as he could see, too, Floris had found peace. Whenever his thoughts oppressed him, he could go to the domine by the Spaarne, opposite the Melk Bridge. He had confessed everything ; how, as long as he could remember, as though a guileful voice was whispering to him within, he had always had to think to prevent himself from doing things he was afraid of. Domine Tuynders had often explained to him about the law of God and the law of sin, but each time he returned he repeated that he couldn't believe that there would be mercy for him, and each time, with a reassuring smile, his arms stretched across the table, the domine told him about the redemption. Then they prayed together, and Floris went away with moist eyes.

He went to Church twice on Sundays and to the Bible readings. As he walked about the town or when he was sitting in his room, all he wanted to think of was his wickedness. He became melancholy from staring in search of the darkneses in which no more thoughts would come. What was the use of believing that it was no longer himself who did the wrong things, but the sin that dwelt within him ? What was the good of the will to good being there, but not the power to do it ? And if the spirit was

prepared to do God's will, but the flesh chose the path of sin, then there could only be conflict, and how could there be salvation if the flesh could only expect damnation? What was the good of believing that his soul could be redeemed, if all through his life he was being urged to do wrong by his sinful body? Nothing, after all, but to wait for another life and in the meantime, here on earth, to endure all his wickedness. What could life then be other than hell for any human being who thought about it? He couldn't understand how his Uncle Gerbrand, who always saw the difference between good and evil, could be so certain and assured, as though he had no fear of judgment; how the domine himself never seemed to fear perdition. Or was it perhaps that they had received grace, an inspiration from heaven, the faith that gave them the certainty of salvation. But he did not believe that it would be given to him. 'Pray,' said the domine, 'pray and have faith.' But supposing one couldn't have faith? Supposing one could do no more than have the will without the capability? Then simply to pray, the whole of one's life to pray to be saved from one's own wickedness—that was enough to make one groan.

And when he thought how it had come to pass, how he had inherited the lying and stealing and deceit, how his own father, in turn, had inherited it from his father, and so on from generation to gener-

ation through the ages ; when he thought of all the people who had lived with sin and fought against it, just as he did, all without help and without result, then he was oppressed. And when he thought of why it had to be that sin was passed on to children who had done nothing to deserve such a burden, then he was frightened. Then there must be injustice, that children should still have to suffer for the sinfulness of the first man. He knew it was wrong to think thus, that it was rebellion against God. But how could he help that, if he himself had not made his sinfulness ? If he was already burdened before he had done anything wrong ? He contemplated all these questions and found no answer, and feared what it would lead to. And perpetually he would say to himself, again and again : ‘ The will is there, but not the power.’

People saw him walking with bowed head ; the neighbours said : ‘ That boy is repentant ; he’ll turn out well in the end.’ It seemed, too, as though he were at peace, for, except to go on errands, he never left the house. The neighbours opposite could see him in his room, sitting at the table with his head resting on his hand ; it was amazing how long he could sit motionless.

He lived in a state of tension too great for his years, forcing himself to think how he could escape from his wickedness until he was past understanding anything and could do nothing but wipe away the

tears that flowed for no reason. The worst thing of all was fear. He wanted to think because he knew that through willing and thinking he warded off something that would gain the mastery over him the moment he lost courage. It was something that lurked and lay in wait in the house, something that he had always felt here. Earlier he used to think that it was loneliness that oppressed him, the echoes, the darkness, with his two uncles whom he sometimes regarded as though they were strangers, Jansje who could look so penetratingly with her pale eyes, and Stien who always sang the same songs, in a monotonous voice, while she swept and polished. But after that night, when he ran away, he had felt distinctly that there must be some other reason why he was never at peace here. He knew that the wall-paper crackled because it was dry and hanging loose, but it gave him the shudders ; he knew that the beams were mouldering from old age, and yet it frightened him when he saw that brown dust had fallen from the ceiling on to the table. Although he had always slept in the same bed and was used to the tapping in the wood under the mattress, sometimes it woke him up with a start. He had a bad conscience, he knew that well, but it couldn't be that only ; in that room in Amsterdam he had never felt this oppression. And he forced himself to sit here and not to go out, for always when he had been out and came home again, the darkness in the par-

lour and the passage seemed worse, the creaking of the stairs sounded louder, and the worn board in front of his bedroom door squeaked more shrilly. The only thing was to accustom himself to the fear, there was nothing else to do for it but to sit still, to control himself and to think of a way out.

He believed also that he could not live long. In the mirror he saw how thin his face was, his eyelids blue, the whites of his eyes greyish and bloodshot. His lips were not bright like a healthy person's, but dark. His mother's had been like that too. It soothed him to look at himself and to think that his life would last perhaps only a few years. Besides, why should he wish to live long, to reach sixty years, working merely for food and clothes, perpetually tortured by his own wickedness, his fears, behind a counter here, behind a counter there, with no other thought than to be good and one day to be redeemed. It is true he sometimes thought of the damnation that was in store for the sinner, but that didn't frighten him. He shrugged his shoulders in front of the mirror, thinking : if only it would happen soon.

Werendonk had often told him that idleness wasn't a good thing, and asked him what he would like to do, but he had been unable to give an answer. One dinner-time when he came to table, his uncle said that he had found a suitable position for him in the office of the notary, Wessels, in Great Hout-

straat ; he ought to be delighted with it, for with industry and good will he might go far there. And indeed he was grateful for it, and promised to do his best. When he went there for the first time he felt a sense of relief. Mr. Wessels, a gentleman with a black beard, spoke kindly to him, saying that he had known his father well, and that he had great respect for his Uncle Werendonk ; he himself took him into the room facing the garden, where Mr. Opman, the junior partner, was sitting at the desk near the window. In this room Floris worked morning and afternoon, sitting against the wall, making fair copies of documents, with a feeling that his torments had left him. But sometimes when he was sent out to deliver a letter, the thoughts returned again, and then he had the feeling that he needed them to keep him alert and watchful for his latent sinfulness. In those first days, too, things seemed to grow lighter. That, he thought, is because I'm no longer sitting in that house like a prisoner. It was a distraction to him to look at people ; he talked more easily, his listlessness left him. The notary accosted Werendonk in the street to tell him that he was agreeably surprised by the boy, he was so industrious and well-mannered, so intelligent and so cheerful. But at home he was still as quiet as ever, and Werendonk realised that remorse still weighed heavily on him. Then he tried to speak to him now and again in a bright tone, but the pains

he suffered and kept to himself prevented him from being cheerful.

One morning Mr. Opman told him to leave the garden-door open, and for the first time the mild weather gave him a feeling of joy. He breathed the fresh air, and he looked at the white flowers against the fence. 'Is anything the matter?' asked the junior partner, when he sat staring out into the garden. He went on with his copying, but he was more than usually distracted by sounds—the scrubbing of the pavements, the tram-bell, and the sound of a horse's hoofs on the cobbles. Sometimes he caught himself sighing. When he was sent out, he hurried off, but in the street he walked slowly, and as though something within him forced him to ; he felt again that necessity to think and to find something that would set him free.

It was on a Sunday afternoon that, standing in his room before the half-drawn blind, he became aware again of the fear of something that stood behind him and was drawing nearer. He had to go out, but he didn't know where to go. For the first time for two years he went into the Forest, where he had not dared to go in the past because of its loneliness. As soon as he was on the road leading to the Forest he began to feel peace ; it was a calm day and a drizzling rain was falling, there was not a soul about. It seemed as though the elm-trees, their branches covered with green buds, had grown taller, as though

the lane was opening out in front of him. It gave him a strange sensation of comfort to feel his feet treading the soft earth, the moss and the dried leaves. Standing still under the branches from which the drops were falling in the deserted Spanjaardslaan, peering at the roofs beyond the meadow, he began to see with new eyes. And he asked himself why he had been weighed down so long under the heavy burden, for he was no worse than anyone else, and, too, he strove much harder against wickedness. And the reason he had done this was because in his heart he believed what his uncle had said : if you questioned your conscience you knew you were sinful, and to live as your conscience bade was the right thing. That is what is demanded of men, Uncle Gerbrand had told him after that terrible day last year, and since that time he had always listened to his conscience. And he had no desire to tell lies any more, and fortunately he had not even felt the worse inclinations. This was actually a beginning of salvation, and it had happened slowly in that dark winter, without his being aware of it. He stood and smiled at the thought, and he delighted in the rain on his face and his hair.

‘ You should do that more often,’ said Uncle Gerbrand, when he heard that he had been for a walk in the Forest, ‘ that will bring the colour to your cheeks. Although I haven’t been there for I don’t know how many years, I remember from the time

when I was young myself that the Forest brings health to the young folks of our town. Only one walk and you are looking happy already.' And Frans said : ' And it's almost at the door, I can still remember that in clear weather you can hear the clock even in the Spanjaardslaan. We boys used to know then that it was time for us to hurry home. I expect we were a bit frightened of Uncle Gerbrand.'

He went there more often ; between office hours only for a quarter of an hour or so ; on Sundays in the morning and in the afternoon. He found the paths where he had played games as a child, the trees on which he had carved his name, and he noticed that the Forest was not as big as he used to think it was ; before he realised it he had walked from one end to the other. In the office he sat thinking about it, how free he felt when he was there, and at home he told them about the lanes and the oak-trees. For the first time for years they noticed that it was spring at the Werendonks, and Stien sang so shrilly that sometimes her voice cracked.

In the April of that spring he saw Wijntje. It was the last house on the Forest road—low, coloured a bluish white, with weather-beaten green shutters, the branches of the chestnut-trees stretched over the roof. He opened the gate, the letter in his hand which he had been sent to deliver there ; the maid-servant stood on the step with her back to him

polishing the bell. As he approached she turned her face towards him ; blushing, she began to wipe her hands on her apron. He addressed her as though he were her superior, and she replied, ' Yes, sir.' He stood still ; he looked at the little leaves protruding from the shiny bracts ; her lips were parted in a smile. When she asked him if he was waiting for an answer, he saw that there were already flower clusters on the chestnut-trees ; he asked her what she had said, and then replied that he would call back for it in the afternoon. He noticed that the blood rushed to her cheeks, but he didn't know that it was because he had raised his hat. Still he didn't go immediately ; he looked at the branches again ; he said : ' It's pretty here,' nodding, and she nodded too. The gate closed softly behind him. He walked slowly and he had to open his coat. And so a new life was born in his heart.

At the office he said he had to return for the answer. He heard what he had said, and followed it immediately with : ' Not that madam said I was to, but I offered to myself.' While he was copying, he could see that smile and that brightness, he had nearly told a lie for its sake, but had put it right in time. She had a broad face, a wide brow, that shone, but the brightness was not only because her face was so fresh, it was a radiance.

At home, in the passage, he asked Jansje why she was looking at him so fixedly. She smiled and said :

‘Because you are looking so well, laddie.’ And Stien, who heard this, put her head round the door.

Approaching the front steps that afternoon, he looked up through the branches again at the clouds, and he saw her head disappearing through a window, fair with a white cap. The bell rang loudly and went on tinkling. When she stood before him on the mat, with her lips parted, he saw that she was small and probably still extremely young. ‘Will you wait a moment?’ she asked. Her eyes gleamed. It was peaceful in the tiled passage; he kept his eyes fixed on the garden-door at the other end until he saw her coming again in her white apron. When she handed him the note, her little finger cocked, he asked her what her name was. ‘Oh, Wijntje?’ he said, astonished. She repeated it; he nodded and looked at her hand again.

At twilight he walked past the house, where through one of the windows in the back room a light could be seen; as he turned back, he noticed how lovely the dark tree-branches were, how soft the ground under his feet; he walked past again as far as the ditch beside the meadow. When he reached this he began to whistle; a cow came slowly towards him; behind him the trees rustled.

Every day now, when he took the Forest road to walk under the trees he would whistle. And one evening, before it was dark, it suddenly came on to

rain so fast that he took shelter under a tree ; he stood there whistling and he saw that the gate was being opened. He knew that it was she under the umbrella. She stood facing him right under the dripping branches. ' I've heard you,' she said. ' Every evening I hear that whistling ; usually it's so quiet here.'—' Wijntje,' he said, ' I'll walk with you for a little while.' She answered that they ought not to, because people would think it meant something, but already he was holding the umbrella tightly, so that she had a free hand to hold her skirt up out of the mud, and she walked beside him up the path that goes round the Deer Park. Now and again they spoke a single word, to warn each other of the roots, but otherwise the only sound was the pattering of the raindrops, and even when they reached the lamp-post in the Drive, they did not speak. She paid a short visit to her parents in Kerkstraat, and when she left and was turning the corner, she was not surprised to see him again in the light from the baker's shop. She said : ' Oh, laddie !' But he took the umbrella again. On the Forest road it was dark now, so that she had to hold on to his arm, and sometimes she had to come closer to him to avoid a puddle. At the gate he asked her which was her evening out, and if he might call for her. She didn't answer, she went through the gate and pushed her hand between the bars. When the door was shut, he felt the rain on

his face ; he began to whistle again and walked slowly away.

Every evening when he walked past, she popped her head out of the window for a moment. And on Saturday evening he accompanied her to Kerkstraat, and afterwards took her home. It was wonderful how easily he could talk to her. Before they had been out together four times, she knew everything about him, how all his life he had had to fight against his wickedness and perpetually had to struggle to keep straight, how he had often thought that the best thing would be to make an end of it. But now he felt sure that everything would be all right, he felt a different person, better and stronger. He often said that it was a relief to him to be able to tell her everything, for he had never had a friend whom he trusted like her, and he had never been able to be completely straightforward with his uncle. Wijntje would listen, her big eyes lowered, and gently press his arm. They were sitting in the twilight on a bench near the oak-leaves, when she said that he was honester than he himself realised, because, after all, he was always struggling with himself, and she didn't do that, although she, too, was very wicked. Yes, she said, if her parents approved she would like to be always with a boy like him.

He watched all his actions more carefully than ever, because he wouldn't have liked ever to feel ashamed in front of Wijntje. And he noticed more

often that he was not telling the complete truth, both in the office and at home, and it was always because it was to his advantage, sometimes merely because it was easier when the full truth involved a lot of explanation. Then he would be angry, and he spoke of it with such self-reproach that she had to comfort him, telling him that, after all, he hadn't committed a sin. It certainly relieved him, but nonetheless he shook his head.

She gave him permission to accompany her to her parents ; in the low front-parlour they sat at the round table with the china lamp on it, and on the window-sill stood a vase of yellow tulips. Her father, who looked extremely old, was bent and had a bald head ; he rubbed his hands ; her mother was short like Wijntje and wore a cap with strings. ' Well, well,' said her father, when he had emptied his cup, ' so you want to keep company.' He talked it over with his wife, and they decided that they must find out first what Werendonk thought about it, for after all their daughter was in service, and the Werendonks were in a better position. No more was said about it, and henceforward he came with her twice a week. And Werendonk, who heard of it, waited to see if it was going to be serious.

But there was happiness in the Forest all through a long spring and a long summer. He always waited for her under the beech-tree, where they had taken shelter that first time in the rain, the same tree where

he had shown her his name. It was always quiet there, as though other couples didn't know this path. Then they walked up the slope to the ditch where the cows were lying in the meadow. Wijntje would ask him if he had been good, whether he had remembered not to worry too much. And he would tell her what he had been thinking about to the minutest detail ; how in the office he had been sitting thinking of a Fairtime long ago, when he had stolen money from Stien's savings, how he had suffered over it, and that now, in recalling it, he didn't even feel regret. It was a sin, he said, which had been charged against him once. But it seemed to him that he was beginning to feel that there was at least a chance of salvation, if one's will was good. Wijntje, walking beside him, was silent, gazing at the dark path in front of her, but he knew well that it was she he had to thank that he was able to say this. Sometimes they stood still under the dark trees. They could hear the bells in the town faintly. ' My Uncle Frans,' he said, ' has such faith in those bells ; he says they tell us that we can always hope again.'—' Yes,' she said, ' I think that too.'

very bones,' he said, 'and it can't be talked out of existence.' Frans looked at him in bewilderment. He asked Jansje what she thought could be the matter with his brother that he had grown so gloomy; the shop was thriving as well as they could wish, and there were no worries. 'It was just the same with your father,' she said; 'at the end of his life he could think of nothing else but sin. Who's to know what may be gnawing at his heart? People change without your knowing why, and the reason for it lies deep. Just look at Stien, who sings louder than ever now, especially when she's cleaning her copper, she can't do enough of it, and there isn't a house anywhere where everything shines as it does here.' And it was true, but Frans hadn't noticed that it shone more than usual. Now he saw it, and he thought that the brilliance of the measures, the weights, the candle-sticks, gave the house a touch of life, especially in the dark back-parlour.

It was Jansje and he, too, who first noticed that there was a change in Floris. He kept his eyes turned away and lowered more than he had done all the summer; he seemed to be nervous, too, as he used to be. At meal-times, when Werendonk spoke about the wickedness of mankind, he looked at him with eyes that were full of sorrow. He stared out at the yard and forgot his plate. 'Hm,' said Uncle Gerbrand, 'you seem to have weighty matters in your head that you despise your daily bread.'

It is well for man to be conscious of his shortcoming, for those who are not perpetually on the watch will soon stumble.' It might even happen that in the midst of these homilies Floris's eyes would fill with tears. Frans noticed it and he couldn't make out what could be wrong with the boy, who only recently had been coming home so happily every day. In the afternoon, after office hours, and in the evening, after supper, he no longer hurried out, it couldn't be because of the weather, for usually he would go out regardless of the rain. One day he asked Uncle Gerbrand if he might whitewash the ceiling of his bedroom himself, and, to the astonished question : ' Whatever for ? ' he answered, a bright flush suddenly suffusing his face, that so many flakes fell down from the old whitewash. Werendonk refused his permission, saying that the old wood couldn't be remedied with new paint. He often flushed up at an ordinary question. ' Have you been in the forest ? ' Uncle Gerbrand asked. He lowered his eyes and said nervously : ' Yes,' with an expression on his face that Frans mistrusted. In the kitchen, too, they talked it over. Stien thought that perhaps there was something wrong between him and the girl. ' Possibly,' said Jansje, ' but he was seen out with her only yesterday, and they seemed very friendly and were walking arm-in-arm. He's telling lies again, that's clear, but I don't understand why, for, so far as we know, he hasn't

been doing anything wrong.' Stien polished vigorously, and wondered what it could be. One afternoon she saw him going into the shed, and she went after him and asked him if he had anything on his mind ; why didn't he speak to his uncle about his sweetheart. He answered that there was time enough, and when she pressed him to tell her what was wrong, he shrugged his shoulders. But he walked away so quickly that she felt certain he was hiding something. And she talked to Jansje about it again and again : ' What can be the matter ? Let's hope it's not going to be like it used to be all over again.'

His nights were restless. He lay awake with closed eyes and did his best to fall asleep. He perpetually had the feeling that he had forgotten something he wanted to remember, but he couldn't recall it, and all the time he had to force himself to seek for it. His mind was a whirl of fleeting thoughts—thoughts about Wijntje's questioning eyes, about letters that he had engrossed badly at the office, about the grey face of Jan Blusser who mocked him ; or again about the domine, about the bench in the Forest, where he had sat alone that evening with Uncle Gerbrand's bitter words in his head. He knew that all these were things he was trying to think about in order to ward off something else. But no single thought remained for long. He kept his eyes closed and listened for the creaking of the

woodwork. Sometimes he thought it was the table, or the window-sill, or again the centre beam on the ceiling, and under the mattress the tapping began again ; first it was only one creature who was at it, but as soon as that began, the other one on the left side followed. Then the first one left off and the other one as well. Why, he thought, why don't they go on tapping ? Sexton beetles was a good name for them, and who knew how many people had already died on this bed ? He ought to be able to get to sleep quietly now. He had told Wijntje that later on they would live in a new house, on no account in an old one where the walls were full of all the wickedness that had lived in it. She said she thought that if people had a clear conscience they could be at peace anywhere, but she had never experienced, as he had, what an old house was like. Suddenly he sat upright, for the table had creaked. He got out of bed, cautiously, so that it wouldn't be heard downstairs ; he groped his way in the dark, he shifted the table gently, and felt to see if the legs were steady. Every night it went on like this until long after he had heard Uncle Gerbrand coming upstairs, slowly, one foot at a time on the treads ; the last step but one always gave a squeak ; he heard his hands pushing heavily along the banister rail. After that the panting in the passage, the coughing in the room next door, a dull thud when Uncle Gerbrand fell on his knees to say his

prayers, and a long sigh of pain. Then they both lay awake, his uncle and he. In August the bad nights had begun, he didn't know why. Walking with Wijntje in the Butter Market along by the stalls, in the crowd he had seen Blusser's face staring out beside an oil-lamp, and all at once he found himself thinking of those evenings at the Fair long ago. On the days following he had felt depressed, and Wijntje, noticing it, had kept asking him why he was so quiet. He told her everything, all about his association with Kolk and Blusser. He had done penance for it, she said, and he mustn't think any more about it. But it was too strong and kept returning. He began to feel now that it was in his bones. A stain on one's clothes could be washed out with soap and water, but a stain on the conscience went right through and couldn't be got rid of. And how could he make it clear to her that he was too wicked for her—that it would lead to nothing but unhappiness if she stayed with him? That was how the sleeplessness had begun, and, lying awake, he had heard the house again. It was never silent here in the night. He knew well that it was silly to take it seriously, for what was a house but dead stone, baked out of clay, and plaster and wood, nails and paint, and if these things made noises it was because they were crumbling, because they were worn out and mouldering. But all the same, if you hadn't a good conscience, it sounded as though

these things had voices of their own, and once you had heard that, there was no more rest to be had. Those damned stories they had told him as a child about the ghosts of sinners and their remorse had given him that stupid belief. But he could hear it, and he could do nothing about it, although his reason knew better. It was curious, too, that in the daytime these noises were not so noticeable, although then, too, it was wood and stone just the same that shrank and flaked. And he knew almost to the minute when they would begin, and what intervals there would be before they returned ; when half-past one had struck from the Tower, he had only to count up to a hundred before something began to creak on the floor between the cupboard and the door, and about thirty counts after that there was a creak under the left-hand window-sill, as though someone had been walking slowly and had halted there. Then he would listen carefully. Then fear came so that he had to force himself to remain in bed. And in the morning, awaking with a start, he felt tired and heavy.

At the office, where the stove burned too fiercely, seated at the little table against the dark wall, he could scarcely see to read Mr. Opman's draft, and if he asked about it the junior partner was impatient. In the afternoon the darkness made him sleepy. Once he got a fright because he thought he was snoring, but it was Mr. Opman himself, sitting at

his desk with his head on his breast. And he went out on tiptoe to deliver letters. For this reason he saved up the letters for the afternoon, and when he was out on messages he didn't hurry, walking in the fresh air did him good. And he could think, so as to clear up the confusion in his head. After the joy of the spring and the calm of the summer he had fallen into gloom again, his faith had left him, and the misery of his weakness oppressed him once more. He couldn't discover the reason. It was not the oppressive atmosphere of the house, which he sometimes blamed for it, for he had not noticed that all through the summer ; it might easily be his own wickedness, but since that terrible time in Amsterdam he had had nothing to reproach himself with. He walked in the rain, in the snow, in the wind, without noticing people, looking only at the numbers of the houses, tormented by the elusiveness of his thoughts, his memories, his uncle's hard words, endeavouring to recapture the comfort which he had found, first with the domine and then with Wijntje. But whenever he returned to the stone passage he noticed that profound emptiness, a hunger without desire. It was sinfulness, against which Uncle Gerbrand had always warned him, will without power, the hopelessness of his lack of faith in redemption. What was the good of fighting against it?

When he walked up and down in the dimness of

Little Houtweg, waiting for her to come out, he questioned himself whether he had the right to allow her to go on hoping that their relationship would be permanent. It would be better to tell her that he couldn't help being what he was, a liar, who might for a time desist from lying ; a thief, who did his best not to steal, but today or tomorrow his sinfulness might turn out to be stronger than his will. It would be more honourable to break with her and to pray for his soul for the rest of his life. But as soon as she opened the gate and laid her hand on his arm, so confident and so happy, he was filled with a sorrow that brought him near to weeping. He was silent because he could not answer, and he felt it was a good thing that they were walking in the darkness and she could not see the tears in his eyes. Then half an hour or so with her parents round the coffee-table, where he did not need to talk because Kroon always had so much to say, and was so long-winded that he hadn't finished by the time they were standing at the door again. That, too, was dishonourable of him, to let these people believe that he had serious intentions. And, without a word, he took her home again. Before he went home himself, he walked a while longer through the quiet streets to throw off his depression. And so it went on all through the autumn, twice a week when they went out. He did not dare to speak.

And once, in February, when he was walking thus after taking her home, in the drizzle along the Raamgracht, he was accosted under a lamp-post by Jan Blusser, tall, bent, with hollow cheeks. They exchanged a few words, and Floris wanted to go on, but Blusser walked beside him, up one street, down another. He had been rusticated, he related, but he had never studied, that was all right for virtuous people, but not for him. In Ridderstraat he took Floris by the arm and dragged him into a beer-house; there were only a few tables and there was no one sitting at them. Floris wanted to go away again, he knew that no decent person ought to go in there, but the waitress was already coming out of the side door. He sat down, and Blusser led him on to talk so that he said more than he had intended.

When he got home he felt a weight had been lifted from him, and as soon as he got into bed he fell asleep. The following morning, at his copying, Blusser's words were perpetually ringing in his ears, his tone of voice, casual and defiant, and he felt himself to be a fool. What good had all his thinking and seeking done him? He was just the same as he had been two years ago, with just as little hope of improvement. Sin had eaten into him, and no amount of thinking could help to get rid of it. It was only now that he felt how tired and feverish his head had been all this time. Although it would

not do to go about with Blusser, for then he would quickly go from bad to worse, he could at least learn from him not to take life so hard as though there was nothing but sin without end. He looked with scorn at Mr. Opman who sat there dozing, and when he got up to take the letters round, he walked ordinarily, without worrying about waking him up.

Two days later the junior partner began complaining about his writing, about spelling mistakes, about blots. When he came down from the office upstairs he threw the documents down on to the table angrily : ‘ What’s the matter with you, boy,’ he asked, ‘ that you’ve grown so careless ? The cost of the paper will be deducted from your wages, bear that in mind.’ At the end of a week, Mr. Wessels summoned him upstairs, and asked him why he was doing his work so carelessly ; he warned him not to forget that for legal documents the utmost accuracy was essential.

He arrived late at the office, he stayed out too long. He was scolded by the junior partner, and at home his uncle, who kept himself informed of every detail, talked about it all the time while they sat at meals, in a bitter and abusive tone of voice that he had never used before : ‘ If you neglect your duty, the next thing will be to stumble on the path of honour ; anyone who doesn’t keep on his guard every moment of the day will find himself in perdition before he knows where he is. But there are hardened sinners,

and with them everything falls on deaf ears, and though you may see the devil standing on their roof, still they will not listen.' And even Uncle Frans began about it ; he came into his room and said in an embarrassed tone : ' My boy, do try to be more careful, for, look you, I'm afraid Uncle Gerbrand will take it to heart if complaints are made, and his health is failing, he can't stand much. And it's true enough that one thing leads to another, and you can never be too much on your guard against temptation.' At first Floris answered sharply, then he was silent.

But he had to hear remonstrance from so many sides that he grew angry and wilfully adopted an air of indifference at home and at the office. For years there had been no intercourse between the family of Diderik Werendonk in Gierstraat and the brothers in Little Houtstraat, apart from the mutual New Year's visits and the odd occasions when the eldest went to talk over the big debt and the paying off. Diderik had joined a different denomination, and was much stricter than his brothers, and as an Elder of the Church he felt himself superior. He despised Kroon, who never went to Church with his wife, and when he walked past the house in Kerkstraat, where Kroon sat close up to the window turning his ivory, he would look straight in front of him. He had given his elder brother a talking to, telling him that it was a scandal for their nephew to

be walking out with the daughter of this man, and in that he saw the explanation of his misbehaviour. One evening when Floris went with Wijntje to her parents' house, her mother began, even before he had sat down at table, reproaching him with his bad conduct which was being visited on them, for Werendonk from Gierstraat had been in and had implored them urgently to forbid their daughter to walk out with him, because it was leading him, so he said, on to the path of frivolity, where he forgot his duties. He had insulted them with his arrogance, saying that a young man who was apprenticed to a notary couldn't after all be serious in his association with a servant girl. Now she began enquiring into his intentions, she spoke sharply, saying that there had been enough trifling, and threatened to put a stop to it. Wijntje sat with her handkerchief to her eyes; her father looked down at the floor. And Floris merely shrugged his shoulders. He could easily have explained that all the notary had been scolding him for was for untidiness in his writing and for arriving late, nothing worse than a boy might do at school, they would probably have overlooked that. But he knew that behind these trifles lurked something serious and that it would be useless to seek evasions. And all this fault-finding put his back up. He answered that he didn't care an atom, and that his uncle should look after his own children. Mrs. Kroon went on grumbling as she

knitted and looked up angrily at him from time to time. When they tried to talk of something else, she would snap at them.

When Floris took Wijntje home, she clung to his arm with both hands ; they had to battle against the fierce wind. In the darkness of Little Houtstraat the bare branches tossed wildy, crashing and creaking. It was impossible to talk. But, close to the gate, she held him back and pulled him with her behind a tree-trunk where they were sheltered ; she put her hands on his shoulders and she whispered that he must not desert her, she would go on helping him with his difficulties. He put his arm round her waist and his mouth touched her cheek. The wind howled, the trees swished beneath the lowering sky, a branch fell on the ground close beside them. He started and said that he must get home quickly, but her cold hands still held him firmly. ‘ You mustn’t go away,’ she whispered again, ‘ something’ll happen if you do.’ When they heard the Tower clock in the distance, she ran off so swiftly that all at once she had disappeared from his sight in the darkness.

The next time he visited her parents, nothing was said of the incident, her mother looked friendly again, her father smoked his pipe contentedly and told them about the time when he was young himself.

But it looked almost as though Blusser was

following him, so frequently was he accosted by him. They went to the beer-house again. He disliked the things Blusser said, his cursing and swearing, his low talk, and yet, without noticing it, he was using the same expressions himself. He thought his mockery of religion and good conduct were wicked, he knew he would lead him into bad ways again, and yet he couldn't resist making another appointment with him. Then at work in the office he was always wondering whether there was anything to look forward to in the evening, and before it was time to leave he would be gone. He banged the door after him, saying to himself: 'I don't care what happens.' He thought of the lies he had told that day, he counted them up, and he felt himself grow hot with shame and anger, but he repeated: 'I don't care.'

Mr. Wessels asked Werendonk to come and see him to talk over the change in the boy, and at parting he advised him to see if he could discover the bad influence. And Werendonk sat in the evenings with his head in his hands. He didn't believe what his brother Diderik had said about the godlessness of the Kroons, any more than he believed what Jansje had told him about the bad youth Floris was sometimes seen with. He thought and thought and he encountered a wall in his mind beyond which he could not penetrate. The fellow was a good-for-nothing, and all the care he had taken to make a

good man of him, and the example of his home, had failed. Sin throve better in some than in others, and the reason for it must remain a riddle. All the prayers that he had offered up for him morning and evening for twenty-one years had been unheard. Werendonk was in despair and blamed himself. But perseverance in faith, he thought, will save his soul.

On his round of payments one Saturday morning he met his brother Diderik, who asked him if he knew that his adopted son frequented low taverns. He, Diderik, had contributed for long years out of his savings, depriving his own children, to cleanse the boy from his father's shame, but if it was all to be of no avail he would give up doing it. He was convinced that it was Kroon's daughter who was inspiring him with evil thoughts, and he persuaded Gerbrand to go with him and talk to Kroon. Frans must be present too, he said, because it concerned them all.

That afternoon they rang the bell in Kerkstraat. Wijntje, who opened the door, said that her father and mother had unexpectedly been called away through a death in the family. The brothers hesitated and exchanged glances, but Diderik said that they could talk it over with her and he stepped to the front and walked in. When they were seated round the table, Frans was the only one who removed his cap. Diderik began to speak. 'Child,'

he said, ' we have heard of your association with our nephew, and that's not surprising, since the whole town is talking about it. We don't know if your parents have brought you up with sound principles, but you are old enough to know for yourself that it is not right to go out walking with a young man unless your association has been approved. You are causing a scandal. But the moral attitude in this house is your parents' business. In short, we have come to tell your father that he must forbid it, because our nephew is not behaving himself as he ought at present. I won't say that you are to blame for this, but, after all, it is you who have caused him to lose his head. Therefore, our urgent request is : Leave him alone. Before he knew you Floris went regularly to Church, the domine was pleased with him, and now he is set on the path of godlessness. I hope you have understood.'

She held her head bent over her breast, a tear rolled down her cheek. ' You mustn't take it to heart so,' said Frans, ' my brother didn't mean it like that.' Then she began to sob, and the three brothers looked at her.

Gerbrand sighed ; he said in a quiet and friendly tone : ' If you love him, perhaps we can see about it later. With an upright heart everything will come right, I can tell you that, my child.'

Holding her hand to her mouth to control herself, she answered : ' Thank you.'

They all stood up. Frans, who was the last to leave the room, gave her his hand.

CHAPTER TEN

EVERY TIME FLORIS CAME INTO THE SHOP WITHOUT stopping to wipe his feet, Frans looked up at him, alarmed, until he had gone up the steps and slammed the glass door behind him. Sometimes a customer, standing there, would say : ‘ Your nephew should be careful he doesn’t break the glass.’ Neither of the brothers answered. Gerbrand Werendonk wearily tied up the parcels, and polished the measures, slowly, carefully, and behind the other counter Frans did the same, his eyes cast down, equally silent. He had noticed the expression of indifference on the pursed lips, foreboding the rude answers that would be heard presently in the parlour. He dawdled purposely, in order to stay longer in the shop, for the silence when they were together oppressed him, as though at any moment something terrible might happen. He could have told them it was a mistake to warn the girl ; after all, it had grieved the boy, and it was only to be expected that it should have exasperated him. He had spoken to his brother about it, but the reply had been that he must remember the path of virtue was not strewn with

roses. There were perpetual complaints from the notary, Frans saw it from the notes that were delivered or from Gerbrand's face, and sometimes he was present when his brother asked : ' Why were you late for the office again ? ' Latterly Floris had not even given an answer. And in the evening he went out immediately after grace had been said, for a walk, he told them, but many of the neighbours were able to tell them how he had been seen with that tall friend of his in ale-houses that Frans had never heard of and that apparently were of bad repute. The last time his brother had forbidden him to go there, Floris had walked out of the door smiling. Gerbrand must be feeling more upset than he showed.

And Jansje sighed. When Frans walked through the passage where she was swabbing the floor, she would leave off and, lifting up her head, that shook perpetually, would say : ' You ought to pay more attention to your brother's troubles ; you do your duty, but apart from that you leave him in the lurch.' But how could he help ? He only went out for about an hour, otherwise he worked as much as he could, and, in any case, he had no authority over Floris. Certainly he, too, had noticed that there was gossip in the street ; the neighbours looked through the window as they passed the shop, as though they thought something unusual was going on in there. Jansje and Stien never talked outside

the house, and yet it was known that there was something wrong with their nephew.

But towards the spring Floris became so unruly that no one in the street could fail to notice it. He rang the bell at night after twelve o'clock, so loudly that it could be heard houses away. Sometimes he stood outside the door for a while with his friends, with noisy talk and loud laughter, and Briemen, who always sat up late, pulled his blind aside to look. Once he had called through the window to them to be quiet, and one of the boys had shouted back at him. On another occasion the whole street was talking of the scandal, how a party of louts, among them young Berkenrode, boys they didn't even recognise, came rolling up with Thijs, the druggist, who was too drunk to walk, and when his wife came to the door to fetch him in, they had hooted at her. There had been quarrelling in the shop between Wouters, who had asked loudly whether these disturbances at night couldn't be put a stop to, and Werendonk, who answered calmly and politely that he would not put up with being called to task in his own house. And Mrs. Sanne, now almost too infirm to walk, scoffed, saying that Werendonk's idea of religion was a fine one—he went to Church regularly, but had no authority over that gad-about. Warner's wife told Stien what all the neighbours knew, that two of the companions with whom Floris went about, boys from an ale-

house in the Donkere Spaarne, had been involved with the police. She gave her to understand that the company he kept was worse than the Werendonks probably were aware of.

Werendonk kept his head high, although people realised that this was an effort for him. He served them attentively, always giving good measure, and when a customer said "Thank you," he just nodded ; he counted out the change calmly, so that it was easy to check it after him. In the evening his broad figure could be seen behind the table, just as it had always been seen. And on Saturday mornings he went out as usual with his basket on his arm, his cap without a speck of dust on it, his eyes always turned up towards the sky. Certainly his shoulders were bowed now as he walked, but everyone knew that it had been a heavy task he had been fulfilling without fail for the last twenty years or more. He seemed to be invincible, as though his troubles had no effect on him. There might have been Sundays now and again when the younger Werendonk had not been seen on his way to Church, but no one could recall such a thing of the elder.

Although nothing had happened at the Weren-donks', the gossip about them continued. That Frans was a simple fellow who did his work well had been known for a long time, nevertheless people remarked now that he must be rather too simple, to work all his life for less than a servant ; someone

had heard that for weeks on end he hadn't asked for a single cent. When some curious person wanted to know what the position was with the brother-in-law's creditors, Wouters was able to tell him which of them was still alive, how much was owing to those who survived, and they counted and reckoned and came to the conclusion that it was a large sum the brothers had raised in the course of the years. 'And what for?' someone asked. Merely for honour's sake, a notion that the eldest had in his head, for no reasonable person would hold it up to the child as a reproach. But that was his idea of what was right. There was a good deal of talk even about Jansje and the servant maid. Jansje, who suffered from palsy, so that her head shook slightly all the time, lived much more economically, and didn't even allow herself any coffee now. One could only imagine that thrift was catching, for Stien who, three years ago, had talked of buying a coat, was still wearing her old one, green and threadbare. And she had grown serious; after a long day's work she would sit up late with her Bible. The only thing she couldn't give up was singing her doleful songs.

At last, one day the neighbours were startled by what had happened at the Werendonks'. In the early morning people were standing outside the door, with their hands to their caps, their coats flying open, for the wind was blowing in wild gusts.

The curtain was hanging out of one of the windows on the first floor, where the panes were broken, the blind was flapping outside. Briemen's wife had seen it at half-past six when she was opening her shop. The window had been pushed out by the beam which was still sticking through it, a cloud of dust had come swirling out, and she had heard young Floris screaming as he stood there in his nightshirt. She had immediately rung the bell and a policeman had come. The onlookers stayed for such a long time that by the time the schools were open the carts could hardly make their way through the crowd. A good many people had thought for a long time that something of the kind would be sure to happen ; the house was so old and, except for painting the outside, Werendonk had had no money to spare for it. Now he would be involved in heavy expenses, probably the whole ceiling of the first floor would have to be renewed. In the shop, too, that morning there was a rush of customers, who stayed longer than usual to watch the carpenters with the scaffolding. Werendonk, his arms crossed, calmly talking to the foreman, said he thought it was not as bad as it looked and that the ceiling didn't need propping up, but he would leave it to him, since he himself was no expert. Many of them thought he was making too light of it, seeing there were cracks through which you could see into the room above. The injury Floris had received from the falling

plaster was not serious ; he had gone to the office with his arm in a sling, still pale from the shock. Before twelve o'clock the shop was in order again, and later on the workmen came to remove the broken glass and splintered wood from the frame. And all through the gossip that went on over the disaster until late that evening there was a note of pity for Werendonk—old Werendonk, as he was called for the first time. They realised what a burden this unexpected expense would be for him, who never spent any money except on his task. Little enlightenment could be obtained from Floris, either by the carpenter or by Werendonk, who questioned him in turn. He had been asleep, he was awakened by the crash of the falling ceiling and the pain, that was all he could say ; he had been very much upset by it, too. To Stien he said, when he stood with her in the attic looking through the hole, that he had seen it coming for a long time, in fact he lay in bed all the time expecting something to happen, and he believed that still worse things were hanging over them. She said that was nonsense, for everyone had always said that the house was on the point of collapsing, so it was hardly to be wondered at that one floor should give way. He pursed his lips as though he were on the point of tears, he went on looking at the hole and it seemed to him a mournful sight. ‘ Come,’ she said, ‘ help me instead of standing there, what’s broken

can't be mended.' So he helped her to carry the mattress up into the attic, and it was put in Uncle Frans's little room.

For days after he could be seen peering at the walls and ceilings, he fingered them and scratched at the paint. It was obvious that his thoughts were perpetually occupied with the accident. 'Wouldn't it be better to pull the whole house down and build a new one?' he asked. Werendonk answered, without looking at him: 'You don't know what you're talking about.' And when they were alone, Uncle Frans said: 'No, indeed, you don't know what you're talking about, the house where your Uncle Gerbrand and your mother were born, and your grandfather and your great-grandfather, and their fathers and grandfathers. Maybe it's a bit dark and not so convenient as the new houses, but we must put up with that considering all the good things that an ancestral home brings us.'

The first evenings he only stayed out for an hour or so, and then he sat for a while with Stien in the kitchen. With the Bible open in front of her, she would chatter to him as though she knew he needed cheering up, but she found it difficult, for there were things she couldn't mention, and when she asked him questions, he answered gruffly. There was something weighing on his heart, and she dared not ask about that. Sometimes he looked at her as though he would like to tell her something. She

told Jansje that there was no doubt he was suffering from the break with his sweetheart. 'No,' she said, 'I know that look better than you do, there's something that pursues him, and, if he was older, he would look exactly like his grandfather used to look sometimes. And if you pay attention you can see it in Werendonk's eyes, too ; those folk have a struggle which we know nothing about.'

But after a few weeks, when the house was smelling of new wood and turpentine, he began coming home late again ; he said good-night casually and had left the room so rapidly that Werendonk, deep in his figures, hadn't even time to answer.

Werendonk had to work late every night now. He had got into the habit of working slowly because his limbs were so stiff and recently, in addition, he had noticed that his head would get muddled. At first he had continually polished his glasses, thinking that they were clouded over and prevented him from seeing the figures clearly, but, even when he had seen them correctly, he would copy them wrongly, and he made so many mistakes in his calculations that he sometimes laid his pen down and waited before starting afresh. Then he got the impression he had been thinking of something else, what he didn't know. And he sat so long, his chin on his hand, staring in front of him, that he was startled when the clock struck. More than once

he put his books and accounts away in order to think over the situation.

He foresaw that there would be trouble with the boy, sooner or later. Mr. Wessels was being very lenient, but if there were too many complaints he would lose his position. He wasn't suited for the shop, and still less for any trade ; he would never find his right place unless his conduct improved. That was the root of the matter. You couldn't expect good work from an imperfect tool. He had been strict with him and had shown him the right path from the moment the boy was able to stand on his feet, he had reasoned with him and had implanted in him a respect for the scriptures, he had forgiven him much, too, time and time again. What good had it been ? The explanation must be one of two things ; either this human creature was not capable of improvement, or the hands whose task it had been to mould him had lacked skill. He had no right to believe the former. But there had been no other hands, more skilled than his own, to take charge of the child. And even though he might have fallen short, he had always had the will to bring him up in strict accordance with his duty. And more than that too. For on these evenings, when he stared in front of him and neglected his figures, he had felt in his innermost heart that the child meant more to him than the fulfilment of a duty. In the beginning it had been no more than that,

but even in the days when he was irritated by the crying of the little creature in the room upstairs, he had felt pity too, because the cries had sounded to him like wailings over the fate he had been born to. And later, when he held the little hand in his, he had certainly thought that this ought to have been his own child. After such memories he would sit for a long time, lost in thought.

And again, sitting at his figures, trying to work out how they were to make all the money for the normal and the unexpected expenses, he would once more begin worrying about the boy, fearing that worse troubles were approaching for which he ought to prepare himself quickly. Any day he might be dismissed, and what was to be done then? Send him to America, as Diderik had suggested, or to the East? As though it wasn't just as necessary there to have a basis of high principles in the struggle to earn one's daily bread. And who was to keep an eye on him so far away?

He picked up his pen again, he began on his calculations, but something kept gnawing at his heart and he wrote the figures down without thinking about them because of something he saw in his memory. Why had he taken in this child without counting the cost? He had been conscious of guilt, but after so many years he no longer knew what that guilt was. That his brother-in-law had made away with himself had happened in fulfilment of

God's will, an insoluble riddle—there was no reason why he should be held responsible for it. And yet at the time he had felt a sense of guilt. But we are all guilty, every one of us, even of our neighbours' misdeeds, guilty from birth until death, and those of us who bear this in mind are bowed beneath the weight of it. He felt chilly. He looked at his hands, purple with cold in spite of the fact that there was still turf in the stove, though it was late in the season. It was old age, a chilling of the blood and a dimming of the mind.

He had seen it approaching for a long time ; he knew that the business and worry of the payments were becoming too much for him, he had discussed the question of Frans taking over a part of it. And once or twice in the evenings Frans actually had sat at the other side of the table and listened while he explained the accounts to him. But he wasn't capable of grasping much of it, and he seemed to be more restless than ever. He nodded, he said "Yes, yes," before he had understood, and his eyes were perpetually wandering to the door.

Something Jansje had said flashed across Weren-donk's mind. 'Your brother is restless, you can see he doesn't feel at ease.' There couldn't be anything the matter with Frans except his passion for the bells. But he remembered that he had seen him once or twice in the passage in conversation, sometimes with Jansje, sometimes with Stien, and

they looked serious and ceased talking as soon as he appeared. When Frans came in on this particular evening, and his hand was already on the door-knob preparatory to going upstairs, Gerbrand, his brows knitted from persistent pain, said to him : ‘ What have you on your mind that makes you so restless ? Tell me.’ Frans’s pale cheeks flushed ; he answered : ‘ Nothing, nothing at all. Except, perhaps, I need hardly say, that I am certainly worried about Floris’s comings and goings. He’s getting wilder, he’s talked about in the town and it isn’t pleasant to hear that.’ And when asked what was being said, he made a gesture with his hand and said lightly : ‘ Oh, it’s too absurd to bother you with it, people think such bad things sometimes, don’t worry yourself more than is necessary.’ And he went hurriedly through the door.

Frans had heard more than he wanted to repeat, but in the kitchen he did talk of it. In the evenings, he left the house shortly after Floris. He followed him, hesitating what to do, until he saw him meet some other youths. Then he stood still as though he were looking at something else. Twice he had addressed him and told him gently that he ought not to associate with these boys. Floris had laughed in his face. And when the youths saw him they pointed at him, shouted and called him names. He didn’t venture to speak to Floris again, but he continued to follow him, always as far as that beer-

house, and when he had seen him go in, he sighed and raised his eyes to heaven. So it went on for weeks, until the summer came. Then he realised that he could do nothing about it, and he gave up following him.

It was summer, an afternoon heavy with heat, there was no sound in the street, and Werendonk was standing alone in the shop which was empty of customers. Frans came in, his cap in his hand, the collar of his shirt open ; exhausted, despair in his eyes, he went up the steps into the parlour as though he were at the end of his tether. When Gerbrand came in to see what was wrong, he was sitting by the wall, his hands hanging down at his sides. He tried to speak, but the tears sprang into his eyes. Gerbrand waited, standing in front of him. The door opened, Jansje put her head round it, and Stien came after her. Frans stammered, repeating the name of Floris, and pointing helplessly in one direction. They gave him water. Then he spoke, but so incoherently that Gerbrand, although he shook him by the shoulder, could only guess what he was trying to say. At last he grasped that Floris had been seen in Great Houtstraat between two policemen. Werendonk took his cap and went out.

He was away for an hour, and when he returned, with a drawn face, he went upstairs to his room. Frans sat alone at the supper-table. He was still sitting there at nine o'clock when Gerbrand came

down at last, but the latter only shook his head when questioned and spread his account books out on the table.

Jansje heard it on her way home, she returned to tell Stien. They sat for a long time with their aprons to their eyes.

During the days that followed Werendonk went out morning and afternoon. When he came back he called Frans into the parlour to tell him about the business. Mr. Wessels remained obdurate, and the reason he gave for refusing to accept repayment of the sum stolen was always the same, that his own good name would suffer if it was known that there had been a thief in his office who had gone unpunished. The matter would have to go to court. Werendonk had been to the advocate, but the latter held out little hope of a light sentence, because Floris had been associating with young men the police had their eyes on.

He continued to go out, but he no longer called Frans, for there was nothing to tell him. Besides, Frans had heard already that he was no longer going to Mr. Wessels or the advocate, but simply walked about the town.

The younger brother served alone in the shop. It was usually quiet, one would have thought the customers were staying away on purpose. And when he had nothing to do, he stood looking through the top of the window at the little patch of sky.

On the day that the case came up in court Weren-donk kept the shop closed ; only Stien and Jansje sat waiting in the kitchen, but he himself went out and later Frans also. The latter came home at dusk and sat up for his brother without lighting the lamp. But, after sitting in the dark for a long time, he went softly into the kitchen and said : ‘ I’m going out for a while, the bells must ring whatever happens, and Simon isn’t able to do it.’

Then he, too, stayed out a long time. At eleven o’clock he found his brother at the table with the Bible in front of him. ‘ What is to happen now,’ said Gerbrand, ‘ when he is released in October ? ’— ‘ May God have mercy on him,’ answered Frans, ‘ we humans are too weak to help one another.’

For three months there was an oppressive stillness in the parlour, in the kitchen and even in the shop, where the people waited and said little. As October drew nearer the brothers grew restless, and even Gerbrand often went out. Sometimes they would meet each other, and although they did not mention it, both knew whence the one was coming and whither the other was going. Once they saw Stien on the bridge, and when the day of his release approached Wijntje too. Werendonk spoke to her, asking her what she wanted, but she could not speak and hurried away.

Before the appointed hour the porter allowed the brothers to go inside to wait. When they saw

Floris coming, a strange smile on his face, they looked at the ground. Without a word they walked out. Then Floris stood still facing Werendonk and said : ' Do you think I'm going with you to that house? Once more to hear of nothing but sin? Once more to be in the old room? And to be stared at in the street? '—' Everything in your room is new,' said Werendonk, ' as for the rest, we'll talk about that later. The main thing is that you're going to be comfortable again.'—' No,' he replied, ' I'm going in the other direction.' And he turned round. Both the brothers together held him fast, but he wrenched himself free, tearing his sleeve, and walked away. At the corner they saw Wijntje coming towards him ; he stood still for a moment, then leapt to one side and ran.

Before the brothers had reached Little Houtstraat they had to put up their umbrellas and, as they had to hold them in front of their faces against the wind, they did not see that the neighbours were at their windows. In the dark parlour Stien and Jansje were waiting, and seeing the astonishment on their faces, Frans told them at once that he had run away. Stien began to cry and hurried out of the room.

That evening Werendonk closed the shop even before his brother had gone out. He laid his papers on the table and sat down, but he did not look at them. All the time the Damiaatjes were chiming he listened to them, and the one thought in his mind

was, how could Frans be so unfeeling as not to be able to forget his hobby even on this day. Somewhere a door slammed, then it was quiet. A memory came into his mind—he saw himself in a strange town opening a bag and holding up a nightshirt. He shuddered, folded his hands and bent his head over them. ‘O Lord,’ he prayed, ‘punish me as I deserve.’

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IT WAS ON A SATURDAY AFTERNOON, AS HE WAS getting ready to go out, that Werendonk was struck by the spotlessness of everything in the house. He had paid no attention to the fact that Stien was working harder, but now he recalled that he never went into the passage, up the stairs or into any of the rooms, without seeing her busy with cleaning materials or a leather, and the sound of the pump in the yard or of water running from the spout into a pail could be heard the whole day long. Not a speck was to be seen on the floors or the window-sills, often they were damp ; the cupboards and chairs shone and the copper looked like new. And all the time she sang. Her songs, which could be heard in the shop, had been getting on his nerves, particularly the lugubrious ditty that began : " Without father or mother, I take up my cross," and he had told her two or three times already not to sing so much. He realised that she did it without thinking, but it irritated him. It was certainly not high spirits that made her do it, and there was enough sadness without being reminded of it. Werendonk

said nothing, he uttered no reproof, though there was much he could have said. He thought Stien was extravagant with a number of things, the whole house smelt too strongly of hearthstone or soft-soap, but he said nothing. He frequently felt annoyed with Frans too. Sometimes he talked a lot, in a slow monotonous voice, about things of no importance, at other times he refused to open his mouth, or twitched his lips and blinked his eyes. Werendonk thought it would be better for him if he went out more, but when he told him to go, Frans stayed away longer than he could be spared. That again irritated him, because he felt the need to go out himself. This feeling was so strong sometimes that even on a Saturday afternoon he called Stien to help in the shop, saying, for no reason that he knew of, that probably he wouldn't be back to supper. He talked, too, about being obliged to have an assistant again.

When the neighbours saw him coming out of the door, his face turned upwards, they knew whither he was bound, and each one of them had something to say about it ; whether it was any good looking there, whether it wasn't sad that a good man should put himself out for a good-for-nothing, who could come to no good in any case.

In the early winter days Werendonk went at least twice a week to one of the ale-houses that Klaas, the son of his next-door neighbour, Minke, or Hendrik,

the tin-smith's boy, had told him about, and he discovered that these lads were better known in these haunts than was realised in their homes. In return for a trifle they told him whereabouts in the town he would find gambling-dens, or where to look for the receivers of stolen goods. Those were the places to look for the young men who might be able to tell him something. He, who had never been in an ale-house, went into bars where the smell revolted him and the tobacco smoke made him cough. At first he was stared at when he ordered lemonade, but when he began to cross-question the bar-tender, the man at once realised what he wanted. In an ale-house in the Wood Market the waiter brought a certain Kleuns up to him, who said he had heard that Floris was in Amsterdam. He went with him to another beer-house in New Kruisstraat, where it looked very clean and there was white sand on the floor, but when he saw two painted women coming out of a side-door, Werendonk felt ashamed to be sitting there. Nevertheless he waited until the other youth came, who was supposed to be a friend of Floris, and who said that he had had a post card from him from Hoorn, that was all he knew, but he thought he was probably with Blusser. Werendonk asked the young man to go with him to Amsterdam to show him the place where his nephew might be. He didn't see the wink exchanged between the two.

Wouters, who had heard that he was searching in Amsterdam, asked if he could speak to him in the parlour. He said that a man like Werendonk, who had a good reputation and was no longer fit enough to wear himself out with wandering about all day in low quarters, would do better to let his son, Steven, help him. Steven was more in the know, he had already told them that those young men were leading Werendonk up the garden path and taking him here and there in order to get free drinks. So Steven, who was a sheriff's clerk, came to see him, and it was arranged that he should make enquiries. He said there were boys in the street who were no whit better than Floris, although no one knew anything about it.

Werendonk had realised that his journeys to the town would be of no use, they exhausted him and, moreover, he did the shop no good by being away so often. He decided to wait and do the work that had fallen into arrears. At the end of two days, one evening, before he sat down in the parlour, he went out to see Wouters on the corner and to ask if Steven had heard anything yet. And he went every evening, just for a moment. Afterwards he sat in the lamp-light with his papers. But he had no peace, there was always something to disturb him. He went into the kitchen to tell Stien to stop scrubbing the floor, and he was hardly seated again before he could hear her sweeping in the yard. That

maid, he thought, had as little peace as himself, she worked more than was good for her at her age. Once or twice he noticed that she sat up late, and that Frans, who was also beginning to come home later than usual, would even then go and sit with her in the kitchen ; he could hear them talking, although they spoke softly. There were noises, too, that disturbed him at his calculations. There was always something creaking in the woodwork for no apparent reason. There were a couple of boards in the passage in particular, sometimes they could be heard even when no one was walking on them.

On New Year's eve he said it would be better not to bake any cakes this time ; when he came back from Church he would go to bed early.

That evening Frans and Stien sat alone in the kitchen, in silence, staring in front of them. When the clock had struck twelve and they had wished each other a happy New Year, Stien said, raising her glistening eyes : ' Let us pray for him, as it is written in the first Epistle of Saint John : " If any man see his brother sin, he shall ask God, and He shall give him life." '

They stood up and prayed silently, and after saying " Amen " they wished each other good-night.

Shortly after the New Year Werendonk became cantankerous, his face contracted as though he was being bothered with twinges of pain again, and one afternoon, after he had called out to Stien that she

ought to be ashamed to be singing all the time like that as though she was a young girl, he went out in a temper, although there was no one in the shop but the new assistant. He went to Amsterdam. There he roamed through what he took to be dubious quarters of the town, and every now and again he came to a standstill outside an ale-house. He went into one of them in a narrow street between two canals ; it was dark there, and it was not until he was seated that he saw Frans at a table behind him. Frans came and sat beside him, lowering his eyes in embarrassment because his brother gave him such a straight look. ' I'll tell you all about it in a moment,' he said. They did not speak again until they were outside. Walking slowly beside him on the dyke, Frans confessed that he hadn't dared to ask his brother for the money, but he had talked it over with Stien and she had offered to lend it to him out of her savings. Minke's boys and another, whose name he didn't know, had brought a message from Floris that he was in great straits. Frans had come with the money and had expected to meet Floris himself, but he had sent that fellow Blusser to say that he was afraid of his uncle. This was the second time that Frans had brought money here. ' He can't be allowed to starve,' he said. Where Floris was he had not discovered.

' So that's what you've been doing,' said Weren-donk. ' But the money shall be returned to Stien.'

When he spoke to her about it, she said that Jansje, too, had given money, that they had done it a number of times, even before the disgrace had come on them. He insisted that they should reckon up what it amounted to.

Once more Wouters came with his son to warn him that his credulity was being abused, for they had been making enquiries, and their belief was that the youths did not themselves know where Floris was. Werendonk listened with his head on his hand, he asked for their advice like a helpless creature and he implored Wouters to think what he himself would do if his son were in danger.

The neighbours noticed that his face had become grey, his eyes hollow, as though he had no sleep at nights. Every day about six o'clock when Steven came home he could be seen crossing the road, sometimes forgetting to put on his cap. People shook their heads, they were filled with pity to see this man, who had spent his whole life working to fulfil a task, tortured with anxiety. Many of them began enquiring here and there to see if anyone had heard of the truant. And rumours were rife, gradually more and more of them.

Tops, the Werendonks' right-hand neighbour, with whom they'd had no dealings for years owing to an old-standing disagreement, brought the milkman into them early one morning. The previous evening the man had been walking in the meadow

down by the water, opposite the Heemstede reed-ground. There, beside a boat moored to the bank, he had seen three youths ; one of them, who looked like a townsman, he had recognised as Werendonk's nephew ; the two others looked as though they might be tramps. This morning he hadn't gone so near, but, even in the dim light of dawn, he had seen in the distance that the boat was still there, and two figures were standing on the bank. Although it was wild weather, with hail and an icy wind, Werendonk put on his jacket at once, and when the eldest Minke boy—for they, too, had heard the story—offered to go with him, he agreed. In the Forest they had to wait for the steam-tram, walking up and down to keep warm. When they arrived at the Heemstede road, Werendonk realised that he had forgotten the way to the meadows, he had to follow Klaas along a footpath, across a ditch beside a gardener's cottage, where he asked a labourer if he had seen a boat. The man went with them. They walked along the reed-ground beside the Spaarne, but the boat was not there. This man told them that a policeman had been there that morning. Werendonk had to walk slowly because of his legs ; he had to rest in the inn, and he sat there silently looking at the floor.

Two days later it was Warner who came to say that he had heard from his brother in Overveen that there, too, three youths had been noticed, of whom

one, from the description, must be Werendonk's nephew. Werendonk could not walk so far, he waited until the afternoon in order to go with the carrier. The Overveen baker's boy was to show him the way, and he led him through Duin and Vaast down the path that leads to the bottom of the hill, for that was where the boys had been seen. They walked the whole afternoon, sometimes enquiring at a cottage, sometimes questioning a passer-by, occasionally they were told that tramps had passed that way, one of them a tall youth. Time after time they took a path that lost itself in the dunes, looking right and left to see if they could find a trace of footsteps. It was beginning to grow dark when Werendonk's leg became so troublesome that he had to sit down on the sand, but it was something worse than the pain that tortured him as his eyes searched beside the dark bushes and along the slopes over which the clouds were drifting. When he arrived home he said that he was too tired to stand in the shop. Frans came in for a moment and questioned him, but he only shook his head.

Late that evening, when his brother returned from his outing, he said that the searches tired him grievously, but he would continue to hunt, for he was convinced that the boy was wandering in the neighbourhood and was in bad company. Even at the cost of his own health he must save him; who could tell what crimes were being committed. 'I

understand now,' he said, 'what the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son must have suffered.' He said he would like Frans to take over more of his work in the shop so as to leave him freer to go out when it was necessary. The Saturday round of the creditors, too, he would hand over to him because he himself had a more arduous task now.

He sat up later because the accounts had got into a muddle, and because his thoughts were elsewhere he did the work more slowly. But he was up again early in the morning, he swallowed a hasty mouthful and went out, telling them not to wait for him. For weeks on end he could be seen going out in fair weather or in rain, and the Wouterses, who were in his confidence, always knew where he had gone. Some people said that it was beginning to affect his mind—how could he expect to find anyone between Velsen and Hillegom with nothing definite to go on, and he a heavy man who suffered from his legs. They did what they could to help him. Those who had relatives outside the town wrote to ask whether by chance a young man had been noticed tramping with two companions, if so, to let them know at once. The young people in the street, too, did their best ; they went out on Sundays in twos and threes into the districts of the polders as far as the dunes. And no day passed but Werendonk had a visit from someone to tell him what he had heard. And he

would go off again with his slow steps ; sometimes he stayed away from morning until evening.

Shortly after Easter the fishmonger came with a definite report. Two days previously, returning along the Zandvoort road, driving slowly because his old donkey couldn't get along in the loose sand, he had pulled up and had seen in the dunes a sort of tent, covered with potato-sacks. A youth in a blue suit, with wild hair, had come into the road and had asked for a few cents, to buy bread, he had said. The fishmonger had had a good look at him, and had asked him too : ' Aren't you Werendonk's lad ? Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself to be tramping about like the scum of the earth.' He hadn't given him any money, but he had given him some bread and butter he had left over. And this morning he had seen him again. He had cautioned him that the police were on the look out for some suspicious characters about whom complaints had been made at Boekenrode. Werendonk told the man to go and sell his fish in the Fish Market, and then to come back for him with his cart.

The neighbours stood at their doors, as though they had heard good news. The Warner and the Wouters boys, anxious to help, set off at once and said they'd probably be there before the cart. Werendonk was seen to be walking rapidly when he came out and there was a touch of colour in his face. They looked after him and, when he had

driven out of the street, there was a lot of discussion in the shops as to whether he was right to put himself to so much trouble. 'That man has the moral standards of an earlier generation,' said Wouters ; ' he realises that we are responsible for all members of our households, and there's no one has better reason for knowing that than he has.'

The sun was going down when the boys came home and described how they had searched with Werendonk. They had each taken a different direction through the bushes and kept calling to one another ; a gamekeeper and a couple of labourers had joined up with them, so that it was like a battue. They had found no one, but they had found footprints as far as the Vogelenzang road.

The next morning Werendonk stayed in bed later, but in the afternoon he was attending to his business again.

Then reports came in from even farther away, from Hillegom, from Leimuiden and from the Westeinder Lake. Each time Werendonk set off—on the steam-tram, in a cab, or on a labourer's cart, and often he had to walk for hours on end. He went to Schoonhoven, too, because his brother-in-law, from whom he hadn't heard for years, wrote to say that he had received a post card from their nephew asking for money.

On arriving home one evening in June, Frans found his brother sitting at the table with his head

on his arms. 'Are you asleep?' he asked. He wouldn't have been surprised, for Gerbrand went to bed late, rose early, and he knew he was not sleeping well at night. He shook him by the shoulder; his head dropped on one side, his face was grey and he was dribbling at the mouth. Frans went at once to fetch water, and Stien, who was still sitting reading, came back with him. He had to rouse their neighbour, Wouters, for he could not carry his brother upstairs alone.

Jansje stayed late in the evenings, because there was so much to do. 'You ought to get someone else,' she said, her head shaking, 'I'm no good any more.' But Werendonk wouldn't have anyone else in the shop or to sit by his bedside. It was she who had to bring him his food and milk and attend to his room. After a day or two Stien noticed that she had grown quiet and sometimes stared in front of her with fear in her eyes; once before she had asked what was the matter with her, but Jansje had answered curtly: 'Go on with your singing.' But one morning, when Stien found her in the kitchen with her apron to her eyes, she suddenly burst into tears and opened her heart. 'I know he's only wandering, but I can't bear to hear it, it's so terrible: "Chastise me, chastise me," he keeps saying in a voice that pierces your very soul. "He has made my flesh old, he has broken my bones." And then again, whimpering like a child:

“When I call upon Him, and lift up my voice, He closes His ear to my prayer.” But worst of all is when he raves about blood and about the scarlet that no hands can wash away. About blood and snow. Surely that man can have nothing on his conscience, you know him as well as I do. There must be heavy guilt deep in the hearts of all men, that a man like him should suffer so grievously from it. And at times he looks as though he could see something ; at other times he starts up and asks if all the creaking is in the next room. I don’t know, but reading the Bible all the time seems to lead to a lot of misery. Go on singing, child, and forget your sins.’

She dried her tears and hurried up the stairs again. When Frans went in to look at his brother, he saw that she was only pretending to be tidying things up so as not to leave him alone. After those first days Stien did not notice anything strange about her, only that she was still quiet and that her head rocked to and fro more than usual.

In August, when Werendonk came into the shop again, he had lost a lot of flesh. He thanked the neighbours who congratulated him on his recovery with a nod, saying that it was no more than might be expected at his age ; and he served again, as of old, slowly and carefully. In the evenings he went up to bed early. ‘The accounts will have to wait,’ he said to Jansje. But on Saturdays he was seen as

usual walking down the street with his basket on his arm.

It seemed as though all at once the neighbours had given up helping in the search ; no one came with reports any more, they had forgotten about Floris. But gossip still continued about the house. One had something to say about the gable, another about the front steps with their rusty railings that grew more rickety every day, or about the high shop door with its one purple pane at the top, which had probably been there for the past hundred years. The corn-chandler's shop had become a house apart in the street. Outside it looked so dilapidated, inside it was so gloomy.

CHAPTER TWELVE

HE HAD BEEN AWAY FOR NEARLY A YEAR. ONE morning, when the smell of autumn leaves from the Forest hung about the town, and the cobble-stones in the street looked as though they had been washed clean by the rain, while it was still dark Wijntje came into the shop with her umbrella dripping. The assistant was still standing alone, and she asked to see Werendonk. He was sitting with Frans at breakfast ; he beckoned to her to come in, and pointed to a chair. But she remained standing, for her dress was wet. ' Well, child, what is it ? ' he asked. She hesitated, she asked if she could count on Frans not repeating anything she said, and when the latter had reassured her, she said that she had news ; her cheeks flushed red as she said it. Weren-donk rose and stood in front of her. A week previously she had received a letter, but she couldn't tell them what was in it, and yesterday another letter had come. He wrote that he was destitute and that in despair he would probably join up in a colonial regiment. He wanted her to ask his uncle to forgive him, he could bear it no longer, but he daren't write

himself. 'I'm sure he means it,' she said, 'he suffers terribly because he is sinful, and he has always struggled so hard against it, I know that better than anyone.' She would have liked to go to the Hague to find him, but she couldn't stay away from her place so long and, in any case, she didn't know where to go, for the only address he had given was the post office. 'You're a good girl,' said Werendonk, 'but now you must help me to get him back.'

He went with her to her mistress's house, the last one in Little Houtweg, and as they walked under their umbrellas they discussed what ought to be done. They came to a stand under the tree where Floris had always waited and continued their talk, and, seeing the tears well up in her eyes, he said: 'Once we can get him back then I'll have a talk with your father.' Warner's boy, who was coming along with the baker's cart, looked at them in amazement. Werendonk walked back slowly, gazing with a smile at the green and yellow foliage from which big raindrops were dripping.

In the afternoon he came back again and talked to her in the passage. The money would have to be sent from her. Every day he visited her there, until her mistress sent a message to say that he might talk to her in the ante-room. Then he would walk for a while in the Forest and when he got home he said he had enjoyed the walk under the trees, with the wind and the fresh smell, he hadn't even noticed

the damp. They had never heard him talk so much about the Forest and the trees. The neighbours asked each other what he could be doing there, and what was the reason for his being seen talking to that little servant girl. In the kitchen Jansje said : ' Mark my words, she's a kind, bright little thing, she'll save the boy yet.'—' Yes,' said Stien, ' you never know what way salvation'll come.'

One day Wijntje came in the evening. She sat talking to Werendonk for a long time. And he closed his books and took her home because the road was so dark. At the gate he held her hand for a while, pressing it in his. On his return he went into the kitchen ; Frans and Stien looked at him in astonishment, he spoke so cheerfully. He said he was going on a journey the following morning, and he believed that this was an end of their trial. Stien broke in to say that everything in his room was in order, so that he would find everything he needed there. They went upstairs to see it. And he commissioned Frans to get in some bellefleurs and wine-apples, because the boy was so fond of them. He was preparing to go to bed when he remembered that he had to put his accounts away, and as he was doing this, strangely enough he suddenly thought of that evening when the little book in which his father's words were written had fallen out of the cupboard.

It was not yet daybreak when he went out, a light

was burning in Warners', and through the open door came the smell of biscuits baking. Stien, looking out at him, noticed how rapidly he was walking.

When he got to the Hague, he asked his way, and when he had found the number on the narrow door of the ground-floor rooms, he rang the bell. A man in shirt-sleeves opened it and he told him he had come to see Floris. 'He isn't here,' replied the man and shut the door again. Werendonk stood still in bewilderment. A policeman who was passing asked him if he was looking for something, and he explained that he had arranged to meet his nephew here. The policeman then advised him to go and look in some of the beer-houses, and he walked with him saying he could see he didn't know his way about. That man, he told him, was a fortune-teller, but he probably did other things with cards as well, and it would be a good thing to get his nephew away from there.

Werendonk went into a beer-house and there he saw Floris. 'I want to speak to you,' he said, 'come with me.' The boy followed him, pale, silent ; and, out on the street, they walked beside each other without saying a word. At last Werendonk spoke : 'My boy, everything is forgiven you, so far as it is in my power to forgive, and if it is your wish to live the life of an honest man, then come home with me, I will do all I can to help you.' As though he were a child, Floris held him by the hand, and, sobbing,

his head bent, he walked at his side. Street after street they walked without saying a word, but when they came to a canal, where it was quieter, Floris began to speak. During this past year, he said, he had done things so wicked that he dared not mention them, he was no longer fit to associate with decent people. He was filled with remorse, and often wondered how it came to be that he had to be like this, for he had struggled against it more than his uncle could know. Werendonk did not ask him what he had been doing all this time. 'We are all sinners,' he said, 'old and young, rich and poor, but some are weaker and do wrong, while others are protected from it. They are the elect. The main thing is to have faith that one day you will find salvation. Have faith, my boy, it is so comforting, and you'll be able to overcome many things then, you'll see. And if temptation becomes too strong for you, tell me and I will help you. I'm the man to whom you can look for help.'

They stayed in the town until it was evening, because Werendonk thought it would be better to come home when the neighbours' shops were shut. Tired as he was, he chose a long way round from the station, beside the Spaarne, where it was quiet and dark. In their own street there was no one about, the lights in the street-lamps flickered in the wind. As he rang the bell, the blind in Thijs's house on the other side of the road was drawn aside,

but their front-door was opened immediately. In the darkness, all that Stien said was that she had put a piece of turf in the stove because it was so chilly, and when they were in the parlour she looked at Floris and saw how thin he was ; then she suddenly laid her head on his shoulder. Frans stood up and gave him his hand, his mouth twitched, but he said nothing. Werendonk asked for chocolate to be made ; they were tired, he said, they must go to bed soon. Thus after a year the boy came home. They spoke of the weather, nothing more. Then Floris went to his room with Stien who carried the candle-stick ; once more he heard the stairs creak. When she had lighted the lamp, he saw that there was a new table and a new bedstead. 'It's a nice room, isn't it?' said Stien. 'Sleep well now.'

Floris was awakened by the sound of loud singing down below, and while he was listening Jansje came in with some breakfast. She gave him no special greeting, treating him as though he had never been away. She told him he was to stay in bed, for rest was always a good thing. He stayed in bed, listening to the singing until he fell asleep again. It was nearly midday when Frans wakened him.

In the parlour downstairs the voices of his uncles sounded cheerful as they sat round the table at their meal. Floris said that everything looked so clean, the plates, the forks, the table-cloth, it seemed like

a miracle. And together with his uncles he folded his hands for grace. They talked a lot, about the news in the papers ; about a great Exhibition which was to take place in Amsterdam next year, where people were to go about dressed in the costumes of their ancestors ; about the news in the town too ; about what had been said in the Town Council about the Fair, which some people wanted to do away with. Floris talked too, he didn't even notice that there was more conversation at table than there used to be. But when Frans said that he ought to go to the barber he replied that he would go after dark, and after that he was silent.

He took the Bible up to his room with him. He frequently had to force himself to go on reading, for often he found himself looking out of the window with thoughts he did not want. At Thijs's they had already seen him. While he was reading Weren-donk came in with a bundle of papers in his hand ; he sat down beside him and said : ' Look here, I know you don't like the idea of being seen by people, but what's past is past, and it's better to go out as usual. Judgment is not with men, but with the Lord, and it's there you must seek it. Go out if you want to, it'll be a little time yet before you're yourself again. You'll have to have some new clothes. And if you want to stay at home, you can relieve me of work by copying these wholesalers' accounts into the ledger. Behave as though you

were just back from a journey full of perils, and take your ease.'

Floris caught his hand, he suddenly felt a warmth from that broad chest, and he began to cry. 'Comé, come,' said Werendonk, 'don't cry, you're on the right path.' And the boy smiled through his tears. 'Stien is still at her singing,' he said, 'nineteen to the dozen; wherever does she learn them all?' She was singing loudly downstairs, in a high-pitched voice: 'Sweet maiden, do not grieve; thy heart deserves no pain.'

He took his cap and went through the shop, where he noticed the clean smell of the chandler's wares. In the street he saw that heads were turned to look at him, but when he got to the corner and Wouters dashed out and gave him a long handshake, he felt relieved, and ventured to look about him. When he returned, the neighbours greeted him.

In the parlour the lamp was lighted early with a new wick that burned brightly. He went into the kitchen where Stien was busy cooking pancakes. And in the evening, when he sat at the table with Werendonk, talking quietly about the work he would be able to do, Wouters came in with his son, bringing a cake that Frans had ordered. One or two customers in the shop observed that there was something afoot, someone asked what it was, and another, who knew all about it, nodded and smiled.

Before he went to bed, Werendonk called Stien

into the parlour and told her there must be some gaiety in the house, he had arranged with Steven that he should come in now and again, and then the company must be served with coffee and cakes, or, when the cold weather came, a cup of saffron milk.

The winter evenings were cheerful. There was only a corner of the table left for Werendonk and his papers, for opposite him, beside the plant, Steven and Floris had to have room for their dominoes, and often Frans would join them when he came home immediately after the chiming of the *Damiaatjes*. Werendonk looked on at them more than he meant to, so that later, sitting alone, he still had a lot to do. Stien came in every evening, smiling, with a plate of one thing or another. And there was joking, and the sound of voices was heard more than had ever been heard there before. No one noticed that sometimes Werendonk's face was contorted with pain.

He had to do his work at night. But even in the silence his mind was not entirely on his task, for his thoughts wandered. As long as the boy was so thin and run-down, he would have to rest and be looked after, but what would the future hold for him when he was well enough for work? Once fallen, it is difficult to raise oneself again, and not many people would hold out a hand. He himself would not take into his shop a boy with a bad name and a

prison record. So long as a man had never committed a crime he could be trusted, but once he had transgressed he might easily have another lapse. That was the great trouble. Once sin has been experienced, it tempts more easily, and then, too, it is much harder to struggle against it. A boy like Floris had to begin right at the beginning again, be led once more to realise the difference between right and wrong, and how could that be done without Werendonk's help? And he no longer had the strength of his earlier years. He was beginning to feel his age, and now that he had so much sorrow behind him, it was clear to him what the boy meant to him.

Every evening he pondered until after midnight ; he saw no way clear. Always he returned to questions and riddles. However much man strove and struggled, there was no salvation for him save in grace.

Before Christmas it was Floris himself who mentioned work. He had thought a lot about it, he said, but he did not know what it ought to be, and he would very much like to get to work. Otherwise he did too much thinking, and he was afraid of that. Hesitating, with bent head, he said that morning and afternoon he read his Bible, and then when he thought about it he realised that he possessed all the sins of mankind, so many that he would never be able to struggle against them, and those were

the sort of thoughts he used to have in the past. If only he hadn't to think about what he had done, it would be easier for him. 'There you are right,' said Werendonk. 'The labour that has been given to us to bear since the first man is a punishment, but also a blessing, it keeps us from much wrongdoing. It is difficult to find something for you to do, unless you care to help me in the shop. You haven't been brought up to it, because I used to have bigger plans for you, but you can become a good man in any station of life. In a year from now we shall be free from our worries, and when we are no more the shop will be yours.' Floris asked him if he still trusted him with money. 'Yes,' was the answer, 'you won't do those things any more, we are praying for that with all our might.'

In the New Year things were busy in the house. Floris was in the shop too, and although he was not talkative, he served deftly, without making mistakes, and he was polite. The customers were pleased to see him there. The work was done quickly, so that Werendonk frequently stood with empty hands. And when there was nothing more to do, Floris could be seen clearing up, tidying, sweeping, and polishing the measures. It could hardly be made to look more spotless than it had always been, and yet he always found something for his cloth or his duster. Jansje and Stien, too, worked more busily in the mornings before the shop was opened, with

scrubbing-brush and window-squirt ; the floor was scoured, the steps scrubbed and the panes gleamed brightly. Passers-by looked in at the shop windows.

And workmen came into the house to build a new staircase and to lay new boards in the passage, for Werendonk thought the old ones had served their time. The wainscoting in the passage had to be renewed, when it was discovered that the woodwork under the paint was crumbling. For days there were painters and plasterers about the place ; the shop and the entrance steps were painted. The neighbours said that there was a change in Werendonk, and that it must be that he was no longer so heavily burdened with the debts.

It was known that he no longer visited his brother in Gierstraat ; he had mentioned to Wouters on one occasion that he had had words with him, about his nephew, about money, and about other things. The neighbours realised that it had been about Kroon also, for he and the other Werendonk were enemies, and Kroon was often seen, sometimes alone and sometimes with his wife, going into the shop. Besides, in the back-parlour a party of dominoes was played, a thing that Diderik Werendonk, now that he had become so strict, would certainly not have approved. There had never been dissension among the Werendonks ; on the contrary, they had always stood together and helped each other. Floris knew that he had been the cause of this difference.

His cousin had said to him : ‘ Do you think that my father is going to go on paying for a criminal ? We and the uncles would have been well off if it hadn’t been for you.’

It stuck in his mind. Sometimes the parlour was crowded with company ; Werendonk had never seen such a thing there in his life before. And he observed that, perhaps in a moment of gaiety when they were all laughing and their voices were mingled in merriment, Floris would suddenly become silent and stare in front of him. He thought it must be that his mind was not yet cleared up, and that the thoughts of the dark period tormented him. One afternoon, when Floris was setting out to do some errands, he spoke to him about it : ‘ My boy, we are doing all we can for you, but there’s still something worrying you. If you’re feeling remorse, remember that the Lord can see into your heart, and if it’s sincere you may trust in him. Or is there something else ? ’ And he mentioned the name of Wijntje whom Floris had not yet seen again. ‘ It isn’t that,’ was the answer he gave with a deep flush, ‘ she knows well that I cannot face her yet, but one day soon I must talk to her.’ And he took up his cap quickly and was gone.

The moments of oppression came more frequently. In bed his thoughts returned to him. He owed everything to his uncle, years of trouble had been spent on him, and he had been rescued from the

lowest depths of mire, everything had been done to make a decent man of him, and he asked himself again and again : What had been the use of it ? It had been nothing but charity which he hadn't deserved.

Nowadays he visited at the houses of some of the neighbours : Wouters, who always pressed him to come in and sit at the table with his sons and daughters ; Warner, who was noted for his surliness, but who was always kind to him and never spoke of the bad days ; Briemen, whom he didn't like because the man got into such tempers, and would beat his wife and daughters for no reason at all, but he insisted that Floris should sit down in their parlour and eat a cake, all to give him pleasure. But he didn't feel at ease with any of them. It's not for my sake, he thought ; if I wasn't the nephew of Uncle Gerbrand, they wouldn't even want to recognise me. They do it for him because they know well that he is a better man than any of them.

Frans, who was much livelier this winter, often talked to him. Once he took him with him to St. Bavo's to show him how difficult it was to manage the ropes of the bells. Frans had never been known to confide in anyone about this. He sat down in the middle of the Church on a rush chair, and the candle-stick stood on the ground in front of him. ' That's how Simon used to do it,' he said, ' with his elbows in the loops because his arms were stiff,

but then you can't prevent the ropes up there from getting entangled, and then one of the clappers strikes double, you know, ding-ding-dong, three times instead of twice.' As they were walking home, Frans said : ' I've never told anyone about that before.' It was a sign of this uncle's goodwill towards him.

But once, coming down from upstairs, he stood by the kitchen door, listening to the words of the song Stien was singing. In the middle of it she stopped, and it was Uncle Frans's voice he heard : ' Yes, my girl, it might have been different for me, too, if it hadn't been for that big debt.'

He turned cold at the words. He went into the shop and he thought : That debt means me.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

HE MET WIJNTJE BY CHANCE, AT DUSK, ON THE Kampervest. She was walking there with her shopping-basket. They stood still facing each other, but except to say good-evening, they found no words. They looked at some boys who were playing noisily with a dog beside the trees. He saw how her eyes glistened, how slender she looked in her clean dress. It was she who spoke first and asked him to talk with her, for she was on her way home. Little Houtweg was deserted, her white apron gleamed under a lamp which had just been lighted. 'I'm not going to ask you any questions,' she said, and after a little while he answered that there was so much to say that he couldn't even begin. When they came to the sandy path, he held her arm tightly to make her walk more slowly, and at the tree where he used to wait they stood. 'I must talk to you,' he said, 'it's worrying me.' She came closer to him. Above their heads, the branches, with their swelling buds, did not move. There was no sound to be heard. They stood, each knowing that sorrow had not parted them, and yet oppressed at the thought of

what had to be said. She asked him to come and call for her on the following evening.

And then, walking in the dark beside the low bushes, his arm linked in hers, he told her about things that frightened her because she could hear from his voice how bad they had been though she did not understand them. He didn't dare either to mention them by name, he merely said : ' When you've done things like that, you've fallen low,' and perpetually he made the excuse that he had struggled against it, but the others had been too strong for him, and when he had done it once he did it the next time without thinking. Sometimes he fell silent as though he saw it all before him again, then he called himself a coward, who would have done better to stay away. That things had been very bad she grasped, and that was quite enough for her, she didn't need to know what and how. She asked no questions, she let him talk. And in the end he was addressing himself with questions and answers, accusing and defending, and they walked for so long that she was tired out.

It was almost too late to go and see her parents, but she dared not stay away. And after that she had to hurry back. She arranged to meet him, and then went, but suddenly she turned back and threw her arms round his neck, whispering that everything would come right. Standing alone in

the darkness, for the first time he felt that a weight had been lifted from him.

He called for her regularly on her days out, and he visited her parents ; they were engaged now. Often he walked beside her in silence, and often she couldn't help asking him if something was the matter with him. Then he began again, disconsolately, with his self-reproaches, saying that he had committed worse crimes than he had confessed to her, and could not believe that he would ever feel himself free from guilt. Nothing she did to cheer him up was of any avail. She spoke firmly as though she were older and wiser than he, saying that she had forgiven him everything, however bad it might have been, and after all, his will was good and he could count on her to help him to live an honest life. Sometimes he pressed her arm closely and believed that she would save him. But sometimes he shook his head at everything she said. God had made him wicked, full to the brim with sin ; what could human beings like them do about it ? He couldn't even tell her about the terrifying thoughts that kept him awake in bed, so dreadful that perhaps it would be better if he made an end of his life. ' Oh, laddie,' she said, ' you have gone through so much, and it can't all be put right in a day, but, believe me, you are no worse than me, but you worry more about it.'

She encountered Werendonk one morning and

she stood for a moment to talk to him about Floris being so tormented with remorse. She had been thinking he ought to have a little gaiety to divert him. 'That's so,' he assented, 'his youth must not be wasted in the shadow of his sense of guilt.' He said he would think it over and probably he would discover something.

He read in the paper about the International Exhibition in Amsterdam, and he asked Floris if he would like to go with him to see it. They set off one morning. In the great building workmen were hammering and painting and unpacking, but Werendonk found plenty to look at. After dinner they examined the model steamboat, and they loitered along the old market square that had been erected for amusements, wine-houses and confectioners' shops, with girls in old-fashioned costumes. Floris said he must come back here some day soon, it was probably very gay in the evening. Werendonk suggested that he should stay on a bit, it was too tiring for himself, and he gave him money. Floris arrived home on the last train.

A week later, he went there on a Sunday with Wijntje. It was crowded and warm. They walked round Old Holland, behind the bandstand, and twice they went and drank raisin-brandy at the Hind's Foot. He talked and laughed a lot, and on the way home he said that she was right, he must look on the cheerful side of life. She felt happy

at his side, and in the dark, quiet streets she walked close to him, holding his arm. She herself suggested he should take her again, she had enough money to pay for it. The second time they joined up with two others, a gay engaged couple, and they spent the whole day together, the girls eating more sweets and the boys drinking more beer than they were accustomed to. 'You can see it's doing him good,' said Wijntje to Werendonk, 'he isn't always brooding now.' It still happened occasionally, when they were out for a walk, that he would suddenly grow silent, and if she then questioned him, he would speak calmly and seriously about the future when they should be married and all the misery forgotten. And frequently he told her that she was a great support, that with her beside him he couldn't fail to keep straight. Wijntje was in no hurry to go home; they walked in step slowly, side by side, and their voices sounded soft in the darkness.

In the early summer it happened more often that he would ask his uncle for money for an evening at the Exhibition, and Werendonk gave it liberally, thinking that it was well earned after a long and arduous day. Then on the following morning he would tell them who he had been with, school-friends he had met again or new acquaintances, and about the fun that had kept them so late. Once Werendonk said that it cost a lot when he went so often, but every time that Floris asked for money

he gave it, saying : ‘ It’s your own wages, after all, that you’ve earned, you can always ask for it.’ But when he had been several evenings in succession, Werendonk, who was sitting up still, asked if he could rely on his remembering his duty. Temptation was proving too strong again and the boy didn’t even realise it. He confessed that he had borrowed money, he promised not to do it again. But when he went into town to pay it back, he forgot all about it, squandered it with his friends and came home late.

Not long after this, walking to the station, he had two stolen guilders in his pocket. He felt there was something strange about himself, but his thoughts were on other things.

The next time he was walking that way, hurrying although he was in plenty of time for the train, he remembered how it had happened, his head grew hot and heavy at the thought. Through everything he did, everything he said, the whole day long there had been something that hurt him, the perpetual torture about the money he had borrowed and had to pay back that evening ; the fear and the inability to ask Uncle Gerbrand for it. He had given a customer fifty cents in change, and the guilder that had been handed to him remained in his hand when he shut the drawer. It was done before he knew it. And the torments grew worse because he was waiting for an opportunity to put the guilder back in the drawer. What had happened afterwards he

didn't clearly remember, but there were two guilders in his waistcoat pocket. It wouldn't be noticed. He felt it at the back of his head, he was afraid of it. At the Exhibition he didn't go and sit with the group of friends, he called one of them out, gave him what he owed him and went away.

He sat outside the café near the bandstand and looked at the people all round him. The figures looked dark as they drew near in the bluish light, passing slowly by the festoons of coloured fairy-lamps. There was a smile on nearly every face. All at once he found himself thinking of Uncle Gerbrand, who was sitting at home, bent and peering short-sightedly through his spectacles. He felt faint and ill, he tried to remember what it was he had to do, but he couldn't. Two thoughts were confused in his brain : either he must speak at once and confess, or he must struggle with himself in silence. He wouldn't be able to bear Uncle Gerbrand's eyes, when he addressed him again with the so often repeated words about sin and forgiveness, looking at him as though he didn't know which way to turn. And again there would be silence in the house and at night sighs in the bedroom next to his. He would rather have anything than that silence, as though the very house turned away from him and grew melancholy.

His glass was empty, he noticed that the people were leaving. He looked round and he thought :

if only there were someone to talk to now, there might be still hope. But he felt that he was alone, that no one could help him. He went away and another thought came to him : it's nothing, I'll ask for the money I've worked for, and I'll put it back in the drawer. But the oppression in his head remained, and he shunned the paths where others were walking.

Uncle Gerbrand was still sitting at his papers. He looked up and Floris realised that he observed something about him. 'Have you had a jolly evening?' he asked. 'No,' was the answer, 'I was bored.' While he was undressing he thought : I must tell myself that I am ill, and that I can't help it, and no one knows about it. The clock had struck one when he heard Werendonk's heavy tread. In the room next to his he heard a deep sigh. Then there was silence in the house. There was no more creaking in the woodwork, such as he used to lie and listen for, but the silence was chill, and oppressed him even more, it was as though the dark walls were looking at him. He lay with open eyes, his mind exhausted.

The very next morning his Uncle Frans asked : 'My boy, why are you so quiet?' And that same day Jansje seemed to be suspicious, she kept looking at him, and that perpetual shaking of her head got on his nerves. In the shop he felt restless, he kept going into the parlour or upstairs, without any

reason, and just stood and looked round. Wherever he was he noticed the silence.

For a few evenings he went out early, saying he was going for a walk. He could bear the loneliness better out of doors, for there he could think about himself and what he could do to improve things. Then he realised that it was the house that got on his nerves, because, just as in the past, when he had done wrong, it was the only thing he could lay the blame on. He wondered if it would have been better if he had been brought up and had to live in another house ; he decided that was nonsense, for the guilt was in him, and he had inherited that at his birth. After all, the others who lived in that same house were all honest people. The reason why it had always seemed dark and dismal was because his own wickedness had prevented him from seeing anything cheerful. But why, then, did he again and again try to fix the blame on the house? Silently he walked beside Wijntje on her evening out, with a feeling that there was something surrounding him that separated him from others ; her voice sounded to him muffled, like a voice coming from a different room. How could he answer when she asked what was wrong with him? What more could he say than what he had said a hundred times before, about sin and the urge to do wrong. ' Floris,' she said, ' do answer me.' And he did not even hear her.

Sometimes, before she went to see her parents,

she had an errand to do in the town. Then he would spur her on to haste, because he wanted to be in the streets for as short a time as possible. Outside in the Forest he did not feel the loneliness so badly as among the passers-by. They looked at him, and he lowered his eyes. But when they walked in the Forest, even her presence began to oppress him. He saw her feet beside his on the path, he knew that she was waiting patiently and he couldn't speak.

It was a still, warm evening as they sat in silence on a bench ; there was still a gleam of twilight over the outlines of the bushes. When the Damiaatjes could be heard, she said that they must go and see her parents now. She looked at him and she saw that he was holding his hand in front of his face. She shook him by the shoulder. Through a sob she heard : ' I can't go on.' For a while she sat with his head on her breast. And, with his face hidden, he told her he had done it again and was at his wits' end. Her tears flowed. ' I can forgive you everything,' she said, ' and I can help you, too, if only you will put your trust in me. After all, there was no need for it, only a guilder or two, why, I could have given you that.' He shook his head in denial—that was not the point. Her voice rang clear, firm. ' Yes, it is, the sin is in the action, for, but for that, we are all alike. Those guilders tempted you, and if you had had a few guilders

from me, the temptation wouldn't have been there, and the sin wouldn't have been committed. We must guard ourselves against that, and you can count on my helping you ; but then you'll have to tell me when you feel the temptation.'

When they got up to go he felt the warmth of her hand on his arm. She was only small and slender, but now he knew that she was stronger and wiser than himself, he could put his trust in her. ' Perhaps I'm not lost yet, if you will help me,' he said. The oppression was lifted from his breast, he was able to speak again.

But when he got home the depression returned. Werendonk was sitting as usual, imperturbable, at the table, a strict man who would no doubt forgive but would never forget. In his bedroom he was aware of the stillness again. And always he was aware of that, wherever he walked or sat, when he was busy in the shop or when he was seated at meals ; Stien's singing had a hollow sound in it, and when she left off it was as though her voice had been hushed by the silence around her. He felt the oppression still more when Uncle Gerbrand spoke to him and looked him straight in the eyes, sharply, through his glasses. He thought about making a confession to him, too, but he was afraid to do it. During this period he felt he must see Wijntje every day. Almost involuntarily he would take up his cap and go out. Then he rang her bell and said to her : ' I've just

come to get a little comfort from you.' Without speaking they stood in the shadow of the door, gazing on to the sunlit foliage of the chestnut-tree.

It was particularly in the evenings that he felt it was too much for him. There were no more round games since he had been going out so often, so he went out and walked about the streets, choosing the lonely ones, where there were no people sitting at their doors. And, although he felt tired, he put off going home. He visited the Kroons and sat there until it grew late ; he was so silent that they kept asking him what the matter was. He went to see Jansje, too, who, as was her habit, was sitting in the dark beside her coffee brazier. ' If you've something on your mind, why don't you tell me ? ' She had guessed it. But how could he tell her that he had become frightened of the house ?

That night it struck him that it would be better to go away. He lay wide awake, relieved, and amazed that he had not thought of it before, his head full of plans to earn his living elsewhere. He decided he must talk it over with Wijntje, for without her he knew he wouldn't have the strength. To the East or to America, it didn't matter where, so long as he was far away from here and had finished for good with the house that had seen him grow up to be a sinner. He couldn't talk it over with Uncle Gerbrand because he couldn't tell him the reason. They would have to go away secretly. He smiled

to himself as he pictured that door shutting behind him for the last time.

Wijntje saw the happiness on his face as soon as she caught sight of him waiting under the tree. It was a mild day in mid-August, and already there was a scent from the leaves that had been dried up in the long drought. 'Yes,' he said, 'we've a lot to talk about,' and he took her arm and walked hurriedly in the opposite direction from their usual way. He spoke quickly, eager now to unburden himself of everything, to tell her of the moods of depression he had had ever since he was a child, of the house that he hated, of the terrors from which he was suffering again now, of the certainty he felt, he didn't know why, that it was the house that was driving him to disaster. 'I don't suppose I'll get rid of my wickedness,' he said, 'but if that house looks at me, I shall go to perdition without fail.' He told her of the idea that had come to him to be released from it. His voice sounded high and happy. Somewhere else, far from here, would mean liberation, and if he could count on the support which she alone could give, he would be able to become an honest man and all the unhappiness of his youth would be forgotten. They stood still at the edge of the Forest beside meadows where cows were browsing as far as their eyes could see, and above their heads the branches swayed. Wijntje stroked the hand that lay on her arm. And staring into the gathering

dusk she said : ‘ Anything, that is what I have been saying in my heart all the time, anything that will bring salvation to you. I will do anything, more than that I cannot say.’

They were to go, they decided, secretly. Once she said it would be terrible for her parents if she went like that, but after that she didn’t mention it again. He was to make enquiries about when a boat would be sailing and how much it would cost. He laughed a lot, and often as they walked he said that the air under the trees did him good.

And once she asked him if he had thought about how they were to get the money to go. Perhaps it would be better if they spoke about it straight-forwardly, she with her parents, he with his uncle, and asked him to lend them the money. Then they would not need to go secretly as though they had something to be ashamed of. She didn’t know his uncle, he replied, he had got it into his head that he was his protector for the whole of his life ; only yesterday he had said that the last debt was paid off, and that he had nothing to worry about now except to make the shop prosperous for Floris. He would never allow him to go to another country. But go away he must, he was certainly not going to stay in that house now.

On the Queen’s birthday Wijntje was allowed to go out earlier, and because it was too crowded in the town they walked longer in the Forest. They

came again to the edge beside the meadow, they sat down there in the tall hemlock. The sun was still shining on the tree-tops. For a while no word was spoken, but Wijntje knew that he was thinking about what she had said again about the money ; he sat with his head bowed. Suddenly she looked at him in amazement, because he asked her something she could not take in. 'What are you saying?' she asked. He repeated it : Did she think that her mistress's bracelet was very valuable? 'If we had that,' he said, 'then we should be all right.' She stared at him, she saw how white his face was in the fading light. She turned her head away and let it droop on her shoulder, tears came into her eyes, and then she sobbed aloud in pain. He stood up. He heard what she said between her sobs : 'O God, save him, save him.' He walked away very quickly. 'Floris !' she cried into the darkness of the lane ; all she heard was his rapid footsteps. Then she fell forward, with her face in the grass.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WHEN HE GOT HOME, SOON AFTER TWELVE O'CLOCK, the light was still burning in the shop, and in the parlour Jansje and Stien were standing with their arms crossed, waiting. In distress they told him what had happened: an hour previously Werendonk had gone upstairs, and on his way back he had been seized with cramp, and had fallen downstairs. He had broken his wrist. The doctor in the Gracht was not at home, so Frans had gone with him to the hospital. 'Falling downstairs isn't much,' said Floris, 'some people get cramp in the leg, others in their souls.' The two women looked at him in silence, and he went upstairs. Lying on his bed, he heard his uncles return, the front-door being locked. After that he listened to the revellers singing in the distance, to footsteps in the street. Something would have to happen tomorrow.

At the breakfast-table, where Werendonk was sitting with his arm in a sling, looking out on to the yard, Floris asked if he was feeling better. That morning, too, in the shop, Frans noticed that there was something queer about him. He didn't hear

what a customer said to him, he swept the money across the counter as though it were dust, frequently he frowned and looked up at the top panes of the window, and stroked the back of his head. And sometimes Frans thought he noticed the suspicion of a grin on his face. It occurred to Jansje, too, that there was something different about him today, he kicked the shop door so roughly, he stamped so loudly on the steps. And he did everything as though he were in a hurry. Werendonk observed how rapidly he served in the shop. In the early evening Floris spent a long time in his bedroom, and when he came down and Werendonk asked him where he was going, the answer he received was : ' To the Bible reading.' He said : ' But there is no reading this evening.' But Floris went out without saying anything further. He came home late, pale and exhausted. And on the following morning Werendonk heard that Wouters had seen him hurrying along the road to Bloemendaal. He asked him what he had been doing so far away, and the answer was : ' Oh, I was just going for a walk.' Afterwards everyone remembered that he had hardly sat down, he was on his feet all day, rushing about in a way that was foreign to him.

Latterly he had often neglected to go to Church, and now there came a Sunday when he went to the Great Church in the morning and evening, and furthermore, so it was said, in the afternoon to the

Bakenesser Church. And when Frans went into his room to look for something, he saw the Bible lying on the table open at the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. He spoke to Gerbrand about it, and asked him if he remembered that that was the chapter their sister was always reading, her thoughts perpetually on sin. Werendonk made up his mind to speak to him seriously, to find out what he had on his mind, but nothing came of it, for Floris was always in a hurry to go out, and only came back when Werendonk, who, with his injured hand, was slow, was just adding up his last figures.

Werendonk met the domine by the Spaarne and from him he learnt that his nephew was frequently visiting him again. The boy had a scrupulous conscience, he said, but it tormented him, and he asked himself more questions than it was possible to answer. What he lacked was not intelligence or goodwill, but faith. To everything the domine said he raised all sorts of objections, and it was only when they had prayed together that he seemed to be relieved for the moment. But the next time he came back in the same state of dejection.

One evening Kroon came in to see Werendonk. He asked if he had noticed any disagreement between his nephew and Wijntje. Yesterday, an unusual thing, she had come home alone, she had kept on crying and would not say what was wrong. And this afternoon when Kroon's wife had been to see her,

her mistress asked her in to the sitting-room and had said that Wijntje had red eyes all day. 'That must be it,' said Werendonk, 'a disagreement between the two. They'll make it up with each other again.'

But that night he felt very uneasy when he sat waiting until past one o'clock before he heard him come in. Although he was too tired to have a talk to him, he told Floris to sit down for a moment. 'No,' he answered curtly. 'I'm going to bed.' He looked hunted and he banged the door after him.

The following morning he asked for money to go to the Exhibition again, and that night he stayed out. 'I can't understand that boy,' said Werendonk to his brother. 'One day he is splitting hairs over what is right and what is wrong, and the next day it's all frivolity again. In his bedroom the Bible lies open as though he had been sitting reading it before he went out, and meanwhile he is forgetting temperance in pleasure.'—'I have been thinking the same,' answered Frans, 'he seeks it here and he seeks it there, but he finds peace nowhere.' In the kitchen the women didn't agree about Floris's behaviour. Stien was of the opinion that what he had experienced at the time of his fall of the previous year and thereafter had affected him too deeply, it would be a long time before his heart could recover from it, and therefore they would have to overlook a lot. But Jansje no longer talked about him so

tolerantly as she had done formerly. 'The weak get all the pity,' she said, 'and nobody takes any notice of what the strong have to suffer, even though they may sink under the burden. Just think of Werendonk. All his life Floris has been his first care, and did you hear what the boy said when Werendonk broke his wrist? For twenty-two years he has watched over him like a father, worked for him so that he might begin life with a clear name. And do you imagine that he hasn't noticed that no fruit will grow on that tree? The boy is a stranger in this house. He has certainly inherited any wickedness the Werendonks had, and more, but he has none of their honesty and uprightness. And my old eyes can still see well enough to know that no pleasure will ever come from him.'

It was the second Sunday that he had been to the Great Church for the morning and the evening service. He went to bed early, and rose early. In the parlour he did what he hadn't been able to bring himself to do for weeks past, he closed the door carefully behind him. At the corner of the Gracht he turned round and stood still for a moment. Except for the baker's, no shop was yet open. Werendonk's house was the highest in that part of the street, it leaned over more than he had ever noticed before, and in this morning light the brick-work looked darker. It gave him a feeling of chill and misery to see it standing there, heavy and

drooping, with the blinds down, as though it was sleeping from exhaustion. Above it a clear light gleamed in the sky. He closed his eyes before he turned round and went on his way.

It was not until he reached Amsterdam and was leaving the station that he considered what he had to do. He had made up his mind once to go away on a ship, but where to find one he did not know. On his left he saw masts sticking up in the grey light, and when he got there he saw the ships lying out from the quay. He went on walking until he came to a steamer with a black funnel, and on a board he saw written that it was bound for the West Indies. He walked up and down for a while, hesitating, and at last he asked a porter what the journey would cost. The man named a sum which frightened him. Walking slowly into the town he remembered the Exhibition ; he would go there again for the last time.

In Old Holland he went into a creamery to shelter from the rain ; the waitresses were busy clearing away and packing up. He sat there alone over a cup of chocolate, looking through the glass of the entrance door which was closed against the bleak wind. Already he was beginning to feel regrets. He must go away, he couldn't go back now, but the thought filled him with melancholy. In his mind's eye, he saw his Uncle Gerbrand, with his broad shoulders, his steadfast eyes, his slow move-

ments ; he saw him in the parlour where, in such weather, it would be terribly dark. And thinking of the house, as it had looked down on him that morning, it was all he could do to hold back his tears. It wasn't unlike the houses here, all round the market-place, but these weren't real and had never seen things happen to the people who lived in them. It seemed queer to him that he should see it now so plainly before his eyes, the clean blue steps, the yellow window-panes, the bricks dark and dead. It was only to get away from that house that he had taken the money. Uncle Gerbrand would never understand it, for he would see that the very evening before he had been reading the Bible. But he didn't understand himself, either, how there could be such a great difference in him between what he wished and what he did. It was useless to think about it. The decision had been made and he couldn't turn back. But his heart was heavy, and the grey weather didn't make it any better here in the midst of these houses, that had been set up like toys for a summer's amusement, empty now and locked up.

In the evening he met some friends and went out with them. A week later he suddenly woke up in his lodgings. Why did I take the money ? he asked himself. To get away from the house, away from the temptation which was always dragging me into sin, to go to some other place and live an honest

life. And what have I done with it? Squandered it. What matter if it is all spent so long as I may see my house once more.

When he went out the sun was shining in a sky clear except for a few clouds that hid it from time to time. He wanted to go to the station immediately but he decided that he would rather return in the dark. He wandered about the town, slowly, aimlessly. Sometimes he looked at a passer-by, sometimes he thought : It might have been different if people had helped me, but they have always been strangers to me.

By the late afternoon he could wait no longer, but in order not to get there too early he decided to walk. Even on the Haarlem road he walked slowly, staring at the sky, red and grey over the meadows. He noticed that his feet were light and hardly made a sound on the stones of the road. The Amsterdam Gate rose up black in the darkness, with a tiny yellow light in the entrance. He stood still for a moment, and then made a detour. At the cross-roads, he hesitated again ; he wanted to go the shortest way, but fear drove him on to the quiet ramparts, where, except for a few isolated lamps, there was hardly a light. He started at the sound of a door being slammed. At the bridge he decided to wait before he went past the house, in an hour or two the shops would be shut, and he would not be seen by the neighbours. Once again

he made a detour through narrow streets where he had not been since he was a small boy ; he walked along the waterside, all round the centre of the town, here and there he stood still, footsore, and retraced his steps again. When he heard the big clock striking ten he was beside the Spaarne behind his house. Uncle Gerbrand was sitting there now in the lamp-light, and his other uncle was probably still out. It was only a few steps from here ; he could venture now for, except for Thijs's, the lights in the shops were all out. He turned into the lane, looking in front and behind him, but half-way along, by the lamp-post, he stood still. He thought, when he had seen the house, that would be the end. He turned back. Without realising it, his feet led him into the darkness of the Forest. And, although it was so dark that he had to hold his hand stretched out in front of him, he knew that he must be outside Wijntje's house. He groped and felt the trunk of a tree. Suddenly he felt so exhausted that he couldn't stand, his knees gave way and, leaning his head against the tree, he said : ' O God, redeem me from my sins.' He could go no farther, he began to tremble with fear. Then he stood up and, groping in the darkness which turned red in front of his eyes, he found the gate and opened it cautiously ; he came on the summer-house where there must be a bench. He lay down, he saw that there was no light in the house, it seemed as though suddenly

the leaves of all the trees were rustling in the wind, he was seized with homesickness for his own house and, weeping, he fell asleep.

It soon became known in Little Houtstraat that he was wandering about in the neighbourhood. Nuyls was the first to come with a story that some boys who had gone out to gather beech-nuts had seen him close by the Laurens Coster Memorial. He was standing bare-headed, leaning against a tree, and he had behaved so strangely that they had run away. A forester came to warn Werendonk, for it was quite possible people might think he was mad. Yesterday at dusk he had seen him go into a thicket ; he had followed and had come across him, kneeling in the dry leaves, his face uplifted, beating his breast softly ; he had spoken to him and asked him what he was doing there, and he had answered : ' If the Church is closed, I suppose I may pray in the open air.' Then he had stood up and walked away. Maybe it was piety, said the man, but it was the piety of somebody out of his mind. The milkman had seen him, too, pale and famished looking, and when he had addressed him, he had walked away.

The neighbours looked at Werendonk, but not one of them asked him anything. He walked with difficulty, sometimes tottering slightly, he was seldom in the shop because, with one arm in a sling, he couldn't be of much use. Through the window he

could be seen sitting at the table, his head sunk on his breast. Often Jansje was standing by him talking.

He had not mentioned to anyone that money had disappeared from the box, for there was no point, he thought, in making more disgrace public. But Jansje pestered him with her questions and her advice. From the day that the boy had run away, she came and stood by him every minute asking him what he was going to do now. Then it would be : ‘ Werendonk, think of yourself at last. You have done everything humanly possible, but it’s hopeless, and no one will think the worse of you if you leave him alone.’ She had a right to say this, had she not worked in his house from the time when his parents were still alive. He merely shook his head. When every day fresh stories were told of the queer way the boy was wandering about, and it was quite understandable that the neighbours should be thinking he had lost his reason, Jansje became more insistent. ‘ You’ll never be so foolish as to take him into the house again ? ’ she said. ‘ If he’s mad, be done with him and send him off to the asylum at Meerenberg. Don’t forget that there’s been nothing but trouble in your house from the day your sister got married. When he appealed to your pity, you did right to protect him, and when he was a transgressor too.’—‘ He is still a transgressor, he has stolen money from the box again.

And it is my duty to watch over him. Even if he were in hell, I would go and fetch him. My legs may be failing me, but my mind thinks of nothing but how I can get him back here.' She clasped her thin hands and held them out to him in distress and supplication : ' Oh, don't, don't, it will be your undoing.'

She spoke to Frans about it too. ' Have a talk with your brother, and try to make him see reason. To forgive seventy times seven is all very well, but he isn't our dear Lord, and he's already done more than can be expected of an ordinary man.' But Frans merely knitted his brows and answered : ' Ah, Jansje, you don't know him.' Frans himself went through the Forest every morning and afternoon, but he would walk along lost in thought, or he would gaze up at the crows, and when he came home he would say that he had searched everywhere. He would try to comfort his brother, saying : ' Have faith, the worst trial passes.'

One day, when it rained continuously and the wind was boisterous, Werendonk sat all the time close to the window looking up at the sky and across the red roofs. And the following morning he went out with the walking-stick he had bought himself. The neighbours saw him walking with difficulty in the direction of the Little Forest Bridge, and craned their necks to look after him.

It was wild autumn weather ; in the Forest gusts

of wind shook the branches, tearing off the leaves and tossing them in eddying swarms, and the rustling in the tree-tops was like the sound of the sea. He frequently had to stand still for the wind took his breath away. On the outskirts, near the road to Heemstede, he sat down on a bench. He felt hopeless, not knowing what to do. His only hope was that, if the boy saw him, his old affection would make him come up to him, and then he might be able to persuade him. But it was senseless to go on sitting here. He stood up and looked across the meadow, where the sun was breaking through the clouds.

He turned round and caught sight of Floris, not ten paces away, holding back the undergrowth with one hand. His eyes looked big in his white face, staring as though they saw nothing. Werendonk turned his head away and, so as not to startle him, cautiously put one foot forward and then the other. He waited before repeating the movement. Then he turned round and what he saw terrified him. Floris had come close up to him, his mouth was stretched wide in a grin, his fists were tightly clenched and lifted on high. Werendonk saw the same eyes with which Berkenrode had looked at him, years ago, when he met him at the railway station before his flight. 'My boy, my boy,' he said in an imploring, quivering voice. Floris leapt back and ran screaming away.

Tottering, leaning on his stick, he returned to the seat and sat there, his bowed head resting on his hand. He felt how weak he was, he could not even cry out in his loneliness, he took off his cap and gazed up at the rustling trees and the clouds.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THAT EVENING AFTER HE HAD SHUT THE SHOP THE bell rang and he opened the door. Floris slipped past him into the shop and ran up the steps and through the parlour so quickly that he was taken aback. He waited in the lamp-light, hesitating whether he should follow him. After a moment, Floris came in ; he walked past him, timidly, and turning his grey face towards him, he said : ‘ Don’t ask me anything.’ And before Werendonk realised what he was doing, just as rapidly and almost without a sound, he had gone out of the shop door. Stien came in with an astonished face. He had come to her in the kitchen, she said, had asked for a piece of bread and butter and, after eating it ravenously, had said : ‘ You mustn’t think it was for the bread I came, but I had to be in the house.’ Werendonk fetched his cap and umbrella, telling her to remain in the parlour in case the bell should ring again, and went out to look for him in the neighbourhood. When he came back, she was sitting waiting with Frans, but he shook his head, and drew his chair up to the table. ‘ Fortunately

it's not raining any more,' said Frans, 'and it isn't cold.' Werendonk sat until long past twelve and when he was in bed he lay sleepless.

The following evening, at the same time, Floris rang again ; he seemed to be less timid, and Werendonk, who could only walk slowly, followed him until he saw him go into the kitchen again. Later, he heard the door on to the yard opened ; he recognised the rapid footsteps on the flags ; he heard, too, the hinges of the shed creaking. While he was still listening, Floris appeared suddenly in the parlour. 'I can't stay yet,' he said almost in a whisper, 'don't ask any questions, there is a time for everything.' And when Werendonk stood up, he shrank back in fear, his voice was hoarse : 'Don't stop me.' He went down the steps rapidly and at the shop door Werendonk saw him put his head inside again for a moment.

An hour later Wouters came in, at the same time as Frans, to make enquiries, for he had seen the boy come and go. Werendonk told them of his strange behaviour. 'Don't worry,' said Wouters. 'He's in a terrible state of mind, but he's sure to recover himself.'

After that Werendonk closed earlier, as soon as the chiming of the Damiaatjes stopped, and after he had put out the lamp he saw that Thijs's wife on the opposite side of the road was standing peeping through a chink of the blind. He was just about to

go up the steps, when the bell rang. Floris stood in the darkness. 'You won't stop me?' he asked. 'Calm yourself,' began Werendonk, but Floris gave him no time to speak, he shouted, stamping his foot : 'I dare not stay.' Then he went slowly into the parlour, looking behind him all the time. Before he opened the door into the passage, he said : 'I cannot stay so long as I don't know what sin is and whether I can be redeemed from it.' Werendonk sat alone and waited. He heard him go out of the kitchen and up the stairs, then he heard him in the room above walking rapidly to and fro. When he returned he came close up to Werendonk, and his voice sounded melancholy : 'I can't do it, not while the neighbours keep looking. Oh, you don't understand. I'll try another time.' He stopped speaking and looked down at the floor. He sighed. 'No one can help me,' he whispered to himself and went out slowly through the dark shop. Werendonk was still staring at the door when Stien came in again and looked at him silently.

All the neighbours knew that he came home every evening, timidly and looking behind him all the time like someone who is pursued. At Briemen's, opposite the lane, they had seen him coming from that direction, creeping, standing still and looking behind him, and when he left he ran through the lane again. Others had noticed him an hour earlier, in the short end of the Gracht, or in the Peat Market,

wandering up and down like a shadow beside the lamp-posts. When he saw Minke's boy standing there, he ran round the corner; the boy had followed him and had seen him hiding behind a tree. Warner's wife had seen him coming out of the lane when she was fastening the shutter of the cellar, she had asked him if he would like a currant-bun, but he darted to one side. Wherever he was mentioned it was with pity, for he looked miserable and neglected; his jacket was torn, his shoes in tatters, his cheeks sunken and hollow. They all knew that Werendonk was unable to do anything; his leg was bad again, and he was rarely in the shop, besides which there was his hand that he couldn't use.

It had become the custom for Floris to arrive about half-past nine; he walked with bent head, and they could see that he was on the watch. On wet autumn evenings the street was always quiet at that time, for nobody would be out shopping, and at nearly every window was the face of someone peeping to see him come and go away again. Jansje, too, although as a rule she went home earlier now because she was getting too old for the work, had been seen returning about half-past nine. They had questioned her—they knew she was against Werendonk taking the boy into his house again. But she had become a cantankerous old woman, and gave them sharp answers. 'Give heed to your own faults; keep your spying for your own homes.'

And it would be late before anyone saw her going home again, dejected, stepping cautiously in the dark.

Jansje waited for him in the kitchen, and when he saw her he shrank back from her. She was on her feet more quickly than Stien, and it was she who cut him a slice of bread and butter. When he had eaten it, she said, looking at him sharply : ‘ If you want bread, come to my house. I’ll give you as much as you can eat, but don’t come here every evening, scaring your uncle.’ Without answering her he went upstairs to his bedroom. When he came down Jansje was sitting with Werendonk. He looked at her as though he were afraid of her. ‘ I can’t help it,’ he said, ‘ I have to come here, I am always thinking of my own house.’ He looked round the parlour and suddenly, as though he had seen something on the blind, he ran down the steps and was gone, the glass panes in the door rattled.

Werendonk was sitting huddled up, exhausted by what he had experienced the last few days, his eyes on the floor ; opposite to him sat Jansje, her eyes fixed on him : ‘ You see, don’t you,’ she said, ‘ that he’s out of his mind, coming here every evening like a ghost, talking nothing but nonsense. What’s it going to lead to, Werendonk, if you let him go on like this and don’t do what you ought to ? I don’t suppose he has anything to eat but what he gets here, his toes are pushing through his shoes, and who

knows where he sleeps, and the winter not far off. And what's to become of you? You're tormented with anxiety, your misery is written on your face, and you're not so fit as you used to be to bear so much. It only means walking over to Meerenberg, they'll fetch him away and take him there. Not till that's done will there be the peace in this house that you've a right to in your old age.'

He shook his head in disapproval. 'He is just as right in the head as you or I,' he said, looking straight in front of him, 'but he's being heavily tried. The sins of his ancestors are rending his mind, and I am waiting and praying that grace may come to him to bring him the light and redeem him. It's the struggle within: I went through it, too, when I was his age. And God knows, for a man who thinks, that struggle is never really over.' Jansje stood up and sighed. Putting her hands on the table and bending right over him, she said: 'Then you must have it your own way, man, I have warned you. But remember what the end of his father was. There is some sin that can only be cleansed by blood, I don't need to tell you that. Your own father wouldn't have been drowned if he hadn't had sin on the brain, don't forget that. Now I must go home again. Good-night, Werendonk.'

She fetched her basket and her shawl and went down the steps out into the darkness.

Werendonk stood up and laid the Bible on the

table before him. He was going to open it, but he thought : Why ? All that is written there about sin I have known for many years. What need for me to seek or question further ? I must pray, pray as long as I have the strength. He placed one hand on the Bible, and laying his head on it, he prayed. He did not lift his head until he heard Frans turning the key in the lock. Frans lingered by the door, and then he said : ‘ Oughtn’t you to go to bed ? There aren’t so many accounts to do, are there ? ’ — ‘ It’s not the money,’ he answered. ‘ I have worried about that long enough. There are other accounts to be settled.’

He sat in the silence, heavy at heart as he thought of what Jansje had said. It was true that, without realising it, he had grown very much like his father. It was true that, that day in the Forest, he had seen the same look on Floris’s face that he had seen on his brother-in-law’s, long years ago, outside the station. The spectres that oppress a man’s spirit return in his offspring. He had always lived trusting in God, had done his best, as far as possible, to keep free from transgression, to be upright in his dealings with others and with himself. How was it then that he was beginning to lose courage, that a thought that he dared not even contemplate obsessed his mind ? How was it that of late he had had the feeling that a dark power was hovering over him ? Was it the weariness of old age, the failing of bodily

strength, the need of the soul to find peace? Here he sat, day after day, helpless, unable to save the boy, who but for him would have gone to perdition years ago. 'No one can help me,' he had said the other night. He could not, that was true. He realised that he was exhausted from praying and waiting, and that it would be better to go to bed. And when he closed his eyes tonight, or in the morning, he must leave the boy's fate in God's hands.

On the way to bed he noticed that the light was still burning in the kitchen. Frans and Stien were sitting there, in silence, with folded arms. And he knew well what they were thinking as they sat. He said it was getting late and went upstairs in front of them; he did not see how Frans and Stien, who came after, followed him with their eyes as he entered his room.

Early the next morning he was in the shop again. Those who knew him well noticed that he was absorbed in thought. When he looked up he would fix his eyes on someone as though amazed to see him there. Often he stared through the window with his brows raised.

It seemed to him that people were changed. When he looked at them their faces seemed larger, pale, the eyes dark. Briemen, on the other side of the road, stood perpetually at the window looking in his direction, and when he turned round to do up a parcel, he appeared to be talking about Weren-

donk, for then another face would rise and gaze at him. Mrs. Sanne's shop-girl kept lifting a corner of the blind, there was only one peeping eye there. And at Thijs's, farther along, it was his wife, busy dusting, who looked out of the window every minute—through the top pane she could just see as far as this counter. There had always been this peeping into each other's windows ; it went without saying that neighbours, who knew all about each other's joys and sorrows, should want to know what was going on, but he felt that this was not ordinary curiosity. The faces had a questioning expression, he couldn't help looking up at them all the time.

Towards dusk it struck him that Minke and Nuyl kept walking by, as though they were only doing it in order to look at him. At first they were talking together, then they were silent and kept craning their necks. Warner stood still, as though he had suddenly been struck by something out of the ordinary ; he lifted his round face to the shop-window where the name was painted, then walked on. In the evening, before closing-time, Wouters came in and said : ' I was meaning to come in and have a chat with you, but I remember now this is the time your nephew comes, so I'll come tomorrow ; we see so little of each other lately.'—' Yes,' said Werendonk, ' that's true.' He felt too tired to talk. But Wouters didn't go ; he lingered, looking at the bags, the scale, the litre-measures, and Werendonk,

who was watching him, noticed that his eyes were stealthily turned towards himself. 'Good-night,' he said at last, and when he was outside the door, his face remained for a moment at the window, pale, with big eyes.

He waited at the table, his books remained closed. Floris rang and went into the kitchen, then upstairs where his footsteps could be heard; he went out into the yard, too, and rummaged in the shed, then he walked furtively out of the shop again. Werendonk prayed over the Bible; afterwards he sat staring into the lamp. There was something he didn't want to think about.

He looked round because he seemed to hear something; he thought it must be the buzzing in his ears that he had had lately when he was tired. He knew he ought to go to bed, but it had become a habit with him to sit up late. It grew chilly in the parlour. Tomorrow Stien would have to put some peat in the stove. Frans came in, rubbing his hands. 'There's a cold wind,' he said, 'but, of course, we're not far off St. Martin's Day.' He went into the kitchen.

Werendonk sat so still staring at the floor that he was startled when the Tower clock struck the half-hour. And now again he heard something in the yard, he thought it must be Floris, although he had seen him go out of the front door. It sounded as though someone was whispering and then softly

laughing. He stood up, and in the kitchen he saw Frans and Stien at the door peering out into the dark. Frans threw the broom out into the yard, it was cats, he said. When Werendonk made ready to go upstairs, a memory he couldn't capture seemed to flit through his mind.

The following day was Saturday, the shop stayed open longer ; Floris came later. Before he left, he stood by the table : ' I can't go on,' he said, ' the winter is coming and it's getting cold. I must be here because it calls me, but the house is too old for me. I've always said so.'—' Nonsense,' answered Werendonk, ' there's nothing wrong with your ancestors' house. But if you would like to live somewhere else, say so, and I'll rent a room for you.' With his hands over his eyes, Floris said : ' That's no use to me.' He wrapped a woollen scarf Stien had given him round his neck and made his way backwards to the door while Werendonk looked at him.

On Sunday it rained all day, but towards nightfall the wind rose again. Stien didn't want to go out, but Werendonk told her that it was better for her to have some diversion after sitting indoors so much. She left the bread and butter ready on the kitchen table.

When Werendonk answered the bell he noticed that both at Thijs's and Briemen's there were faces at the dark windows, lit up by the flickering street-lamp ; there was no one in the street. The boy

went into the kitchen, and he waited by the table. After a while he heard him going upstairs, and then into the yard and in the shed ; he couldn't think what he was doing there, but he decided to leave him undisturbed. The reflection of a lantern being carried to and fro kept passing across the blind. Just as the Damiaatjes began to chime, he noticed that the wind was blowing smoke down the chimney, but it couldn't have been from the stove. Suddenly there was a loud ring, knocking and kicking at the front door. He went, slowly, because his leg was stiffer than usual ; he could see at least four faces outside, arms waving wildly ; he heard shouts. Bending down to open the bolt which must have been pushed in by mistake, was an effort, and meanwhile he saw that still more people were standing there. When he opened the door he heard them shouting ' Fire ! ' He asked : ' Where is it ? ' They pointed upwards. He went out on the steps, looked up and saw the window glowing dark red. ' The fire-engine ! ' they were shouting. The people were jostling each other, more came from the doors of all the shops. Werendonk stood motionless, he seemed to be stunned. All at once he drew himself up ; he was standing there alone on the steps outside his door, a tall figure. It was quiet at that moment, the Damiaatjes rang out clearly. The people turned towards the fire-engine which was driving round the corner of the Gracht ; no one saw him go in.

Men ran into the shop with hoses, they came rushing back, for thick black smoke was swirling out of the back-parlour, soon it was pierced by red points of flame. They all rushed sideways, driven by the smoke that was pouring out.

A boy saw it ; he pointed upwards ; the people looked up at the window. There was the figure of Werendonk, one arm was tearing down the blind, the other hand held Floris by the collar ; they saw the young man beating at it. They saw the white face of Werendonk fall forward against the window ; it broke ; the sparks flew out ; the whole window space was filled with flames and smoke.

An hour later, when Frans came, the firemen were still busy running in and out. The window of the shop was shattered, the gable, charred black, leant forward, showing the three black gaps of the upper windows. He stood and looked, wringing his hands. A neighbour led him away. When the clock struck twelve, the street was empty save for a watchman.

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